THE COMICS MAGAZINE - JUNE #11

Borderline

Interviews with:

Stan Lee
Jim Woodring
Greg Fox

Features on:

Gay comics
Polish comics
Spider-Man movie
Football comics
Cla$$war
Fred Beltran
Strontium Dog
Adrian Bamforth

+ much more reviews, columns, small press features the works!

BORDER LINES
POINT & CLICK INDEX

IN THIS ISSUE..

Industry Standard – *Martin Shipp believes in calling it how he sees it!* 3

Uncool Beans – *Phil Hall explains the CBW debacle.* 3

Larry & Leonard – *iconic gay comic strip is cancelled under bizarre circumstances.....* 12

Busty Babes in Cover Story Shocker – *Fred Beltran is the new Hot Babe artist, here's a look at his new book.* 13-14

Greg Fox – *an interview with the creator of an on-line comic strip about a bed and breakfast venue run by gay men.* 15-17

Robert Kanigher – *Goodbye Sgt. Rock...* 18

Dave Berg & Tom Sutton – *another bad month for losing comicbook legends...* 19

The Cla$$war begins – *Com.X's new, critically-acclaimed superhero book is not just an Authority rip-off, say Rob Williams and Trevor Hairsine. Jay Eales takes a look...* 28-31

The Jock – *An old UK small press veteran takes the Borderline route to maximise readers.* 31

Stories for Girls – *Selina Lock talks about producing her first ever comic, the much-vaunted Girly Comic...* 32

Issues – *Carol Close returns from her vacation refreshed and bitching to go...* 33

What Is Manga? - *Kevin Hill looks at the genre in general in his first round-up of recommendations for beginners and those new to manga...* 34-35

Transatlantic Meditations - *Arnold T. Blumberg talks about Spider-Man... In the wake of all the publicity, he tries to look beyond the exterior of the Wallcrawler, to see if he's a nice guy!* 35-36

Comics Milestones – *Mike Kidson looks at the unlikely success of a UK girls' comic abroad.* 37

The Blank Page - *Chev takes an alternative look at ... yeah, bloody Spider-Man again...* 38

Learning Curves - *Sarah Littlehales looks at Alan Moore and a few more cartoon capers...* 39

Man on a Mission - *Martin Shipp thinks he's guest-writing World of Heros!* 40

Continental Drift - *Kevin Schomburg returns with a look at Saigon-Hanoi...* 41

Comics 2040 - *Comic Conventions from 2040 brought to you by Paul (Hit Me!) Rainey.* 44

Search/ Destroy Agent - *Jay Eales talks to Jonathan Clements about the Strontium Dog audio play wot he writ... John Parkinson talks to the real life star of the play.* 45-48

The Verdict - *Borderline's jury of reviewers - attempting to cover everything from pamphlets to graphic novels. Have they reached the right Verdict? Do you agree with the Borderline Jurors? Plus reviews of books, manga albums spotlight, small press, mainstream and alternative!* 49-59

Spider-Man: The Movie – *A not so exclusive, but all the same comprehensive, review of the new blockbuster...* 60

Beautiful Losers - *Ande Morgenson looks at The Fish Police – a masterpiece or just another one that got away?* 61-62

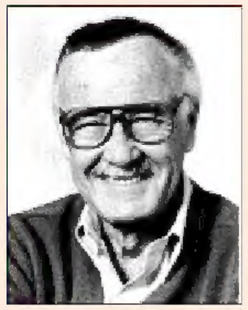
Drawing Board - *2000AD new star Adrian Bamforth shows us his wares...* 63-64

World of Heros - *Chris Spicer and the WOH team's satirical and sometimes close to the truth (but not quite) news coverage...* 65

Miffy - *Ady Kermode and Terry Wiley's adventures of their sexy young airheaded creation.* 66

Tank Girl Competition – *your chance to win one of ten free Tank Girl Volume 1 collections direct from Titan Books!* 66

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE.. *in the week that Spider-Man was released to world wide success and even the odd good review, the Godfather of Marvel Comics deemed us worthy of an interview.* 4-7

BEING FRANK ABOUT JIM! - *Dan Epstein delves into the psyche of one of comics' most innovative and surreal creators. The definitive Jim Woodring interview – right here – right now!* 7-11

THINK POLAND ENDS WITH LECH WALESA? *Think again - Dennis Wojda, Barney Berns and Witold Tkaczyk look at the unbelievably excellent Polish comics market. Another comics country that knows what it's doing.* 20-28

SOME PEOPLE ARE ON THE PITCH! *They think it's all over, but in truth it's just about to begin... Borderline celebrates the FIFA World Cup with a look at soccer comics.* 42-43

borderline
THE COMICS MAGAZINE

Published by *mediahall.*
Each issue is available to download FREE from the following Website:
http://borderline.mediahall.co.uk plus any of our affiliates with download points.

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This month's mind-blowingly psychedelic thanks go to Ian Sattler, Thierry Frissen, Fred Beltran and all at Humanoids, Dennis Wojda and our new friends in Poland, Stan Lee, Dan Epstein and to every single one of you that wrote in support after the collapse of Cool Beans World. Cover design by the weirdly tattooed Humanoids, art by Fred Beltran – Now listen carefully children, or teacher will suffocate you...

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INDUSTRY STANDARD

Martin Shipp takes the helm with a broadside at assholes...

CHILDISH. That is, and forevermore will be, the view of the comics industry held by those who choose not to be part of it. Like it or not, there will always be those who see comics not as an artform but as a peculiarly lower form of entertainment, a way for the slightly-odd to occupy their time.

Juvenile. That's the way we're seen. Despite the potential of the medium and despite the beauty it can convey. Despite the maturity of much of its nature. Despite the love and the craft that is lavished by some on its creations.

Oafishness. The behaviour of too many within this industry. For at least the past forty years and probably longer, there has been an element of what marketing men call "knocking copy", the practice of doing down competitors while promoting one's own. It can be good wholesome fun, it can give everybody a bit of a laugh, it can even spur the victim into addressing their perceived shortcomings.

Recently, though, the practice of knocking one's competitors has degenerated. We live in a world of near-instant mass communication, where presentation is becoming all and events are becoming, more than ever, globally shared experiences. The past year in particular has brought this phenomenon to the fore, and at the same time showed its knock-on effects. For instance: benefit books for the victims of last September have brought in a new wave of potential consumers. They may have come for their own reasons and in some cases those reasons may not have been entirely altruistic, but nevertheless they have either returned to or come to comics for the first time. Some of them may have stayed, and used the astonishing amount of information to which we now have access in order to find out more about the medium.

What do they find? Representatives of major companies doing their best to denigrate their competitors. Poaching of key personnel. The unpleasant sight of publishers doing down their own product, their own staff, even their own creative personnel. They see catfights, rampant egomania, downright nastiness. And all the while, even as we show our uglier side, we scratch our heads and wonder why there's such a high churn rate among comics readers.

This behaviour simply isn't found elsewhere. You don't see the head of Paramount Pictures telling Variety.com he thinks Miramax suck. You don't see the CEO of Sony Music calling the CEO of WEA a tosser, and rightly so. It's stupid, it's childish and it belongs in the playground.

Moreover, it seems that these attention-seeking pranks within our industry are growing more infantile. The shock value has to be increased every time, the ante continually upped. What next, though? Buckets of water balanced over the door? Cherrybombs down the toilets? Or in these more technically-empowered times, is there some gang of sniggering idiots just waiting for a slow news day that will see their hi-jacking of a competitor's website or their amusing spoof e-mail - or, more importantly, the effect it would have on the victim - pushed that much higher up the running order?

I'm not going to throw my arms up in the air, grow my hair and start asking the musical question "Why can't we all just get along?" There's nothing wrong with good-natured knocking. But it's getting a little out of hand and it's beginning to look like the actions of the bully and the coward. Frankly, if you feel your publication isn't good enough to make an impact without some stunt attached to it, then you should also feel your publication isn't good enough, period.

So let's pack it in, shall we? Actions have consequences. The consequences of knocking your own people are that any creative worth their salt will not want to work for you, your product will suffer and as a result so will your sales. The consequences of technical tomfoolery are that no matter how well-concealed the footprints, traces are left and perpetrators identified. The consequences of these petty, puerile actions will be a further contraction of a customer base that is already shrinking faster than a detached ice shelf floating away from Antarctica.

Let's grow up. Let's start acting as adults. Maybe then we'll be treated as adults. *Martin Shipp*

UNCOOL BEANS?

IT'S not the end of the world, but it got pretty close. There was a point on Thursday May 16 when I seriously considered calling it a day and getting on with the rest of my life.

I've since been informed that Cool Beans Productions went down owing £1.8 million, which makes the £3,250 they owed Borderline look a bit insignificant. But, of course, most of us are all too familiar with the term "it's all relative".

In real terms nothing has changed. After a couple of months on a website that had repeated errors and problems (unexpected, considering we're the amateurs and they're the professionals, but we never had the problems they seemed to encounter) we're back on our old website and ... well... that's about it really. The key principals in Borderline's production are smarting from being stung big time - the worst thing about getting a company bounce a cheque on you is that your bank then charges you a ridiculous £25 for bouncing said cheque. So Cool Beans not only defaulted on the only cheque they sent me, but Barclays Bank gets an extra 25 quid and Cool Beans plants another kick on me, via a third party.

Isn't life just wonderful, eh?

I actually thought that Cool Beans World was a good idea - even now, two weeks after the event, I'm convinced that this is *one* way of moving forward. Despite it now looking like it was greed that motivated them to team up with us, the marriage seemed, on paper, like it could have been worth some long-term investment. The Internet isn't going to go away, it is changing and it may end up becoming something quite different from what it was originally designed for. It takes companies like Cool Beans Productions, magazines like Borderline and the host of entrepreneurial people out there to iron out all the bugs - to be the pioneers - to fall at the hurdles, but to pass along valuable knowledge to those following in similar footsteps.

We'll still be here next month, maybe with some good news, maybe with some bad, but whatever news we have, let's hope it's beneficial to the future of the comics industry, because it's been a long old month... *Phil*

Images
Stan Lee by Dew Freidman, various promo photographs and artwork from the 7th Portal and Marvel's Millie the Model series

LEE IS *THE* MAN

AND DON'T YOU FORGET IT!

STAN LEE hardly needs any introduction - does he? OK, for the benefit of any of you to whom he might be just a name glimpsed in a credits box, from the early 1940s until 1972 Stan was the chief editor and writer of the company variously named Timely Comics, Atlas Comics, and then Marvel Comics. He co-created, wrote and edited Spider-Man, Fantastic Four, The Incredible Hulk, The Mighty Thor, Iron Man, The Avengers, Doctor Strange, The X-Men… need we go on? We will anyway; Stan Lee is one of the chief architects of the modern American comicbook industry, and without him it would look nothing remotely like it does today.

Still working a longer day than most in his 80th year, still writing the Spider-Man newspaper strip and busy with new movie, DVD and book projects, Stan has an extremely hectic schedule, to say the least! Borderline's Mike Kidson caught up with him just two days after the premiere of the Spider-man film; despite the fact that he also had half the media journalists in the USA ringing him constantly in search of a quote, he graciously found time for a brief, relaxed exchange about projects past and present…

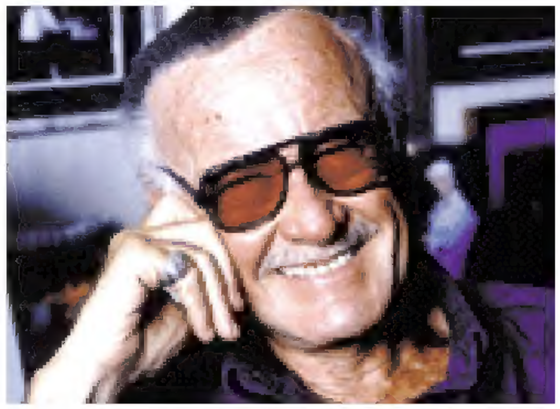
On Movies and Media

Borderline: How did you like the Spider-Man movie?
Stan Lee: Like it? I loved it!

BL: Do you think it captures the spirit of the character that you and Steve Ditko created?
SL: It captures it perfectly!

BL: You appear in the movie very briefly, but I believe you had a longer scene in it which ended up on the cutting room floor! How do you feel about that? :-)
SL: I'd rather they had kept it in, but the picture ran so long they had to cut it. However, I'm sure it will be in the DVD version.

BL: How did your role in the Kevin Smith movie Mallrats come about?
SL: It was very simple. Kevin called me and asked me to do it.



BL: What was it like working with Kevin Smith?
SL: It was great. He's a terrific guy.

BL: When we were setting up this interview, you mentioned that you have two movie projects currently in hand. Is there anything you can tell me briefly about those?
SL: Sorry. They're all Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer movies and, as you can imagine, MGM wants to make the announcement itself at the proper time.

BL: Are you still working to bring 7th Portal to big screen audiences?
SL: It's always available for anyone who wants to do it.

BL: Stan Lee Media; is there still a likelihood of it being a going concern, or do you have a new publishing enterprise under way?

SL: SLM is defunct! However, I've formed a new company, "POW! Entertainment" (POW! = Purveyors Of Wonder!), which is set up to do movies, television and interactive games - nothing to do with the Internet.

BL: Are there any plans to bring 7th Portal back to the Internet, or to other media?
SL: Not to the Internet. As for any other media, we'll have to wait and see.

On Comics

BL: You entered the comics industry in 1939; I'd love to ask what it was like working in comics at that time, but that's a big question so I'll settle for asking whether you thought that the industry would have the staying power that it's turned out to have, or whether you thought that it would be short-lived and just something to begin a career with?
SL: I never questioned that comics would have staying power - but I wasn't sure how long I myself would stay in the field.

BL: You once commented that you began signing your comics work as "Stan Lee" because you wanted to retain your birth name for the Great American Novel that you intended to write. Do you still want to write that - or do you feel that you have in some sense fulfilled that ambition anyway?
SL: I think I'll leave the Great American Novel for someone else to write. I'm too interested in movies and TV right now.

BL: What did it feel like to become the chief editor of Timely Comics at the age of 20?
SL: Actually, I was about 18 at the time - it felt great. I could hardly believe it.

BL: Of the many creators who worked for Timely/Atlas during the 1950s, one in particular has long struck me as being a special artist, who died far too young - Joe Maneely. How did you feel about his work?
SL: He was the *best*! If he had lived he'd have been one of comicdom's greatest legends. He was the fastest artist I had ever seen and one of the most talented - and dependable. He never turned in a job that wasn't totally excellent. He could draw *anything*, and do it better than almost anyone else. And he was the nicest, pleasantest guy to work with. His death was a tremendous loss to comics and certainly to me, as his friend.

BL: You kept the company running through the many crises that beset the industry during the 1950s. Would I be correct in thinking that your steadiest sellers during those years, your "cash cows", were the Millie the Model titles?
SL: Honestly, I can't quite remember. Certainly the Millie titles lasted a long time, but so did the Kid Colt Outlaw and other Western titles and also the animated titles such as Terrytoons and the romance titles - and on and on.

BL: Why did Millie's rival Chili have the unusual surname "Seven"? (To be frank, I'll be amazed if you can recall something so trivial - but it's puzzled me for years, so I might as well ask!)
SL: Believe it or not, there was a well-known real life model at the time whose last name was a number (I forget what number it was). So I called Chili "Seven" in her honor.

BL: Around 1960 Chili's surname was changed to the slightly more conventional "Storm" - a name you used again shortly thereafter for two members of the Fantastic Four! Did you have any special fondness for, or associations to do with, that name?
SL: Not really. I don't even remember changing Chili's name to Storm. Maybe some later writer did it?

BL: To male readers of Marvel Comics, Millie the Model may have been little more than a running joke in Bullpen Bulletins, but the main Millie title remained in publication until the early 1970s. Was it still a healthy seller for you during the 1960s?
SL: I'll guess that it must have been or else we wouldn't have continued to publish it.

BL: When you began to produce superhero comics in the 1960s, the element in your work that strikes me as having differentiated it most markedly from other publishers' comics was a "soap opera" style - continuous development of characters and situations, overlapping plotlines and so forth - which was really something new to comic books. What led you to try that approach with superheroes?
SL: The best answer I can give is that I was writing the way I wanted to write. Nobody told me to do it and I finally had the freedom to do it my own way.

BL: Whereas most other comics of

the 1960s appear to have been written primarily for young children, your Marvel series seem to have been much more suited to high school and college students. Were you deliberately aiming to open up an older readership for comics?
SL: I simply tried to write stories that I, myself, would like to read. I tried to keep them clear enough so that a young reader could understand and enjoy them, and intelligent enough for older readers. Actually, the only audience I ever had in mind when writing a story was myself.

BL: Throughout the 1960s you seemed to be writing at least a dozen series a month, in all kinds of genres and each with a distinctive voice! Where on earth did you find the time and energy?
SL: I had plenty of energy although finding the time was the toughest part. I put in very long hours, sometimes not getting to bed till 3 in the morning.

BL: Besides writing so many series, you were tying them all together into the coherent, highly marketable overview known to fans as "the Marvel Universe". As with the "soap opera" style, this was more or less unprecedented in the industry. Again, what led you to try it?
SL: I don't know. It simply seemed like the most natural, obvious thing to do.

BL: You've written the Spider-Man newspaper strip for many years since ceasing to be active as Marvel's editor-in-chief, but did you - do you - miss writing monthly comicbooks?
SL: Not really. As long as I can keep busy and feel that I'm being reasonably creative, I'm happy. Besides, I think I've really written enough comicbooks by now.

BL: In a nutshell, what's the Stan Lee secret of good comics editing? Do you have a word of advice on this for young, aspiring editors today?
SL: Gee, I'm not sure. Just make sure the characterization rings true - get characters the reader will believe in and care about and try to introduce elements that have a feeling of originality so the reader doesn't feel "Aw, I've read this a lot of times before." And keep a lot of surprises in the story so the reader wants to keep turning the page, not knowing what to expect.

BL: Do you have any favourites among the comics currently being published?
SL: Not really. I don't have time to read them anymore.

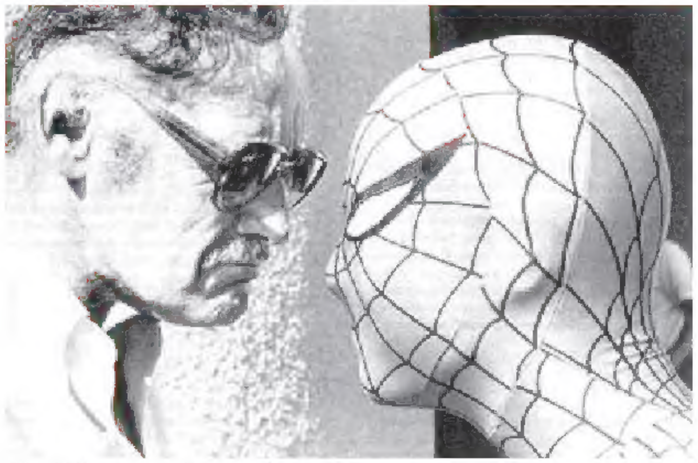
BL: What do you think of what Joe Quesada and Bill Jemas are doing at Marvel nowadays?

CHILI STORM, WHY ARE YOU SO UNWILLING TO LET ANYONE KNOW THAT BENEATH THAT WISE-CRACKING EXTERIOR THERE BEATS A REAL HUMAN HEART!??
AW, COME ON, BLONDIE! QUIT SLOBBERING OVER ME!

SL: They're doing a superb job. My hat's off to them.

BL: In a word, how do you envisage the future of comics?
SL: I think they'll be around forever. They'll have their ups and downs like every other field, but I think they'll always be with us. And they certainly should be!

BL: Finally, since your biography is going to be coming out very soon, I thought it might be fun to run a few old-style pop magazine questions past you! What's your favourite meal?



SL: A '95 Mercedes 300E convertible.

BL: What do you like to read for pleasure and relaxation?
SL: I don't have time for that kind of reading anymore - alas.

SL: Whatever I'm eating at the moment.

BL: What kind of music do you most enjoy listening to?
SL: Show tunes mainly. Anything by Lerner and Loewe or Rodgers and Hammerstein or Cole Porter, etc.

BL: What are your favourite types of clothes for leisure wear?
SL: Jeans, sneakers and a sweater.

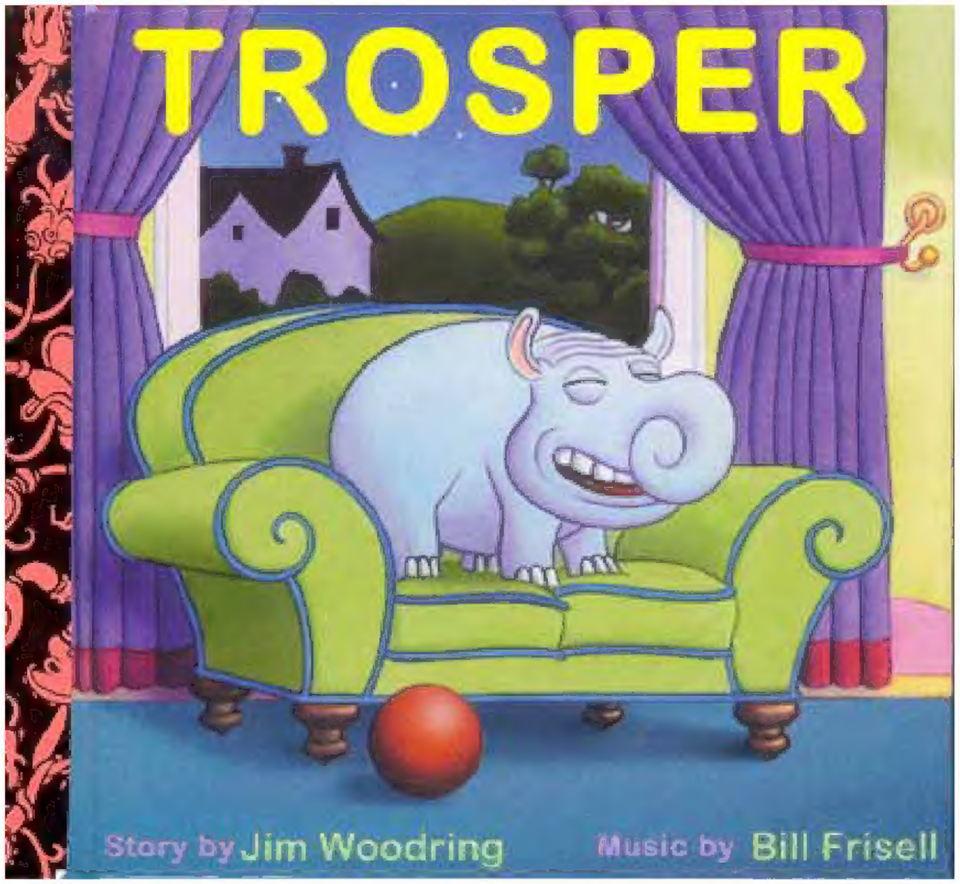
BL: What's your favourite car?

BL: Can you give me a quick sketch of a typical day - if there is such a thing - in the life of Stan Lee?
SL: Wake up. Breakfast. Go to the office. Come home as early as possible. Start writing. Dinner with my gorgeous wife while we watch TV. Write some more. Go to sleep.

BL: Is there any last word you'd like to say to Borderline's global readership?
SL: Yep - EXCELSIOR!

BEING FRANK WITH JIM WOODRING

IN an industry where most creators will wax lyrical about the comics characters they loved as children and always wanted to write or draw, Jim Woodring stands out as an exception. Self-taught, far more aware of Surrealism than of Superman, he found work as a storyboard artist at Ruby-Spears Inc. during the 1980s, working on some of the trashiest of Saturday morning cartoons alongside a bunch of guys with names like Kirby, Toth and Kane whose previous history was unknown to him. He eventually did a few projects for the major American comicbook publishers, generally as a colourist; but all the while he was compiling a body of deeply introspective and highly individual comics which combined his love of surrealism and knowledge of animation art into a vision which is superficially attractive and deeply disturbing, and which, through publication by Fantagraphics, has won him a small but highly devoted audience. Following the recent publication of his children's book Trosper, Borderline's Dan Epstein talked with the 50 year old industry "outsider" about his life, his thoughts, his influences and his intentions...



Borderline: What inspired Trosper?
Jim Woodring: It's a story that I originally did as a comic strip for my magazine Frank. It was printed in that format so badly and so small that I longed to see it in nicer format. I arranged to have it come out as the new book.

BL: Obviously the format of the book resembles a Little Golden Book [the line of children's books put out by a division of Random House].
JW: That was an afterthought.

BL: I love the little binding strip that gives it its unique look of a Little Golden Book. You designed the whole thing yourself, were you a big fan of those children's books?
JW: No more than most children, probably.

BL: Why was it delayed for so long?
JW: I'm not entirely sure what happened. There was some miscommunication with the publisher. It's a mystery to me.

BL: It comes with a jazz CD by musician Bill Frisell. How closely did you work with him?
JW: We talked about it a lot. Bill & I are friends. He actually recorded forty-five minutes of music for the book and then I selected the parts that went into the CD in the book. I picked 3 two-minute sections; I isolated them from the rest of it and then blended them together.

BL: Was Fantagraphics apprehensive about putting this book out?
JW: It was really a cut and dried process. All the printer had to do was to make a pocket in the back of the book, which is easy. The print run is small enough that they are putting in all the CDs by hand. It was a little unusual but not a huge departure.

BL: How long did it all take for the book to come together?
JW: Golly. It wasn't something I worked on too intensively. I went about it in a relaxed way. Maybe a few months.

BL: Is Trosper the name of the little rhino character?
JW: Yes, but like my character Frank it is ambiguous as to what animal it is or if it is an animal at all. Frank came from my wanting to create a character that is purely a cartoon character. He's not a cartoon animal or human. I wanted to create a comic strip that existed outside a certain time or place; that's why it has no dialogue. There's no nationality then either.

BL: Like a lot of your other work there are a lot of holes and vagina-like holes in this book, do you see that?
JW: Oh yeah. I like my work to have a Freudian charge. That's one of the great mysteries to me.

BL: Why is that?
JW: People simplify Freudian symbology by saying it's about sex but to me it's about whatever force manifests itself in anyone. I have heard people say things like "Jim Woodring must think about getting laid a lot. Because of all the cunt and cock stand-ins in his work." To me that symbology points to a kind of energy that drives the universe and that is a shorthand way of expressing it.

BL: Many people have compared you to Salvador Dali and other great surrealists, do you see eye to eye with that and were they an influence?
JW: They weren't so much an influence as they were a confirmation. I grew up without any kind of artistic influences, support or encouragement. I didn't really know about the surrealists until I was in high school when I went to a big surrealism exhibition [the Surrealism retrospective in the Los Angeles County Art Museum in 1968] and saw that these grown up men and women had been trying to lay bare all of these truths in the same way I was trying to in my work. It sort of confirmed that that sort of endeavor was worth undertaking and it made me feel encouraged to stay with it. Dali, in particular, really fascinated me and still does to this day. I have probably every Dali biography ever written and I read them all over and over again compulsively. I think, in a lot of ways, he is a fantastic object lesson in terms of what it is like to be a supercharged, super-inspired and damaged artist and have to contend with life.

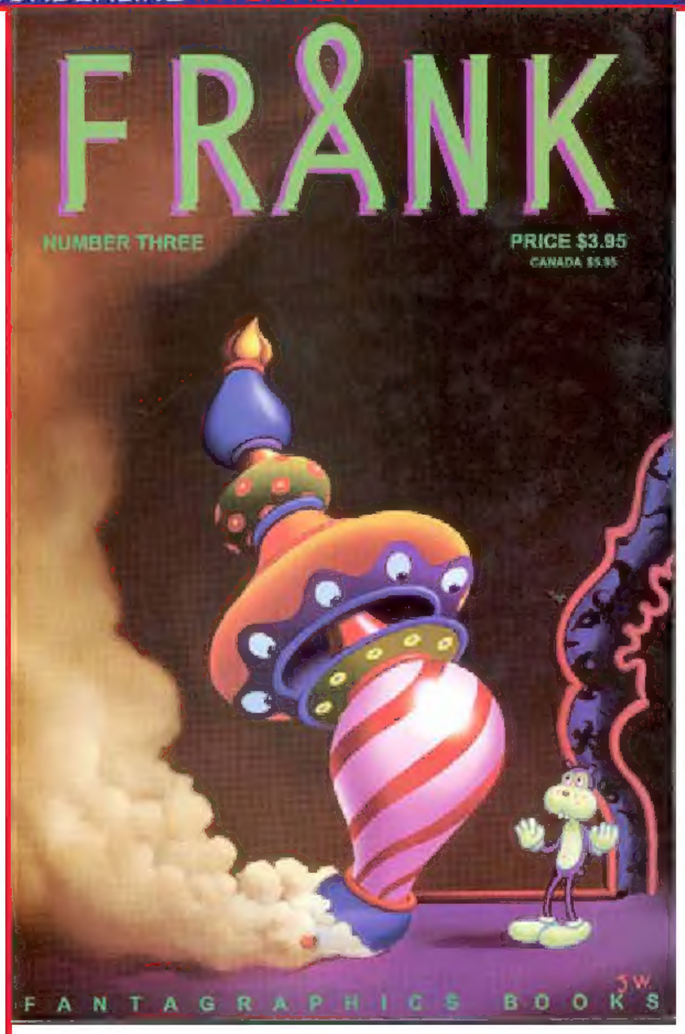
BL: Do you feel you are also a supercharged and damaged artist?
JW: I would say so. His situation is so fantastic because his relationship with his wife was largely responsible for getting him to where he eventually got. There are certain artists, not all of them surrealists, whose work comes close to being absolutely perfect in terms of what I like to see in art. Max Ernst is probably my favorite surrealist and is charged with that otherworldly glow. I'm not really so interested in the movement of surrealism as much as the individual artists.

BL: If you get to New York there is a great surrealism show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I really liked Hans Bellmer's work. He was obsessed with this life-sized doll with four legs he made.
JW: His stuff really repulses me and kind of turns my stomach.

BL: What comic book artists do you enjoy?
JW: I like a lot of the ones everyone likes. George Herriman, Winsor McCay, Cliff Sterrett, E.C. Segar and Clare Briggs.

BL: A lot of your earlier work was autobiographical. How much of your work is now?
JW: Practically none of my published work. I still write a lot of autobiographical tone poems. But I haven't worked them up into

We Quarrelled



was totally focused on the divine and my work has to do with a lot of temporal creepiness.

BL: You have produced album covers for Bill Frisell, The Grifters and Soul Coughing. How did that work come to you?
JW: Well, Bill and I have been friends since 1993 and that cover led to others. We're working on a stage production right now that is going to go up in New York City in June this year. It's going to be Bill Frisell on stage with two other musicians playing, while images of my work are projected behind them.

BL: You also designed and illustrated an issue of Francis Ford Coppola's literary magazine Zoetrope: All-Story. *How aware of your work was he?*
JW: Someone from Zoetrope approached me but it was at his suggestion. A friend of mine was working at Coppola's compound on storyboards for a production of Pinocchio that never got made. He gave Coppola some of my comics and he liked them, I guess. We've corresponded a little. I would like to work with him but he deals with so many and what I do is not really up his alley so I would be surprised.

BL: I know you did some work for Roger Corman. What did you do exactly?
JW: It was a comic book adaptation of *The Wasp Woman*. But it unfortunately was never published. I wrote the whole thing out and it was the best comicbook script I ever wrote. Solana Lopez drew a few pages of it and then it was axed.

BL: Your parents were a toxicologist and an inventor; did their work influence you?
JW: Well my father was more of an engineer. He didn't so much manufacture anything but he developed various kinds of electronic innovations. I don't think what they did influenced me. My folks and I had a very oil and water relationship.

BL: Yeah, you've said you were in a confused state a lot of the time while growing up, how so?
JW: I hallucinated a lot when I was a kid. I experienced paranoia and I heard voices. I misunderstood a lot of things. I had a lot of confusion about what was what and what was supposed to be what. I didn't understand humor, what was supposed to be scary, what people were saying to me half the time, when I watched cartoons I saw all kinds of messages that weren't there. It took me a long time to sort all that stuff out.

BL: Is that one of the things that led to your alcoholism?
JW: Probably.

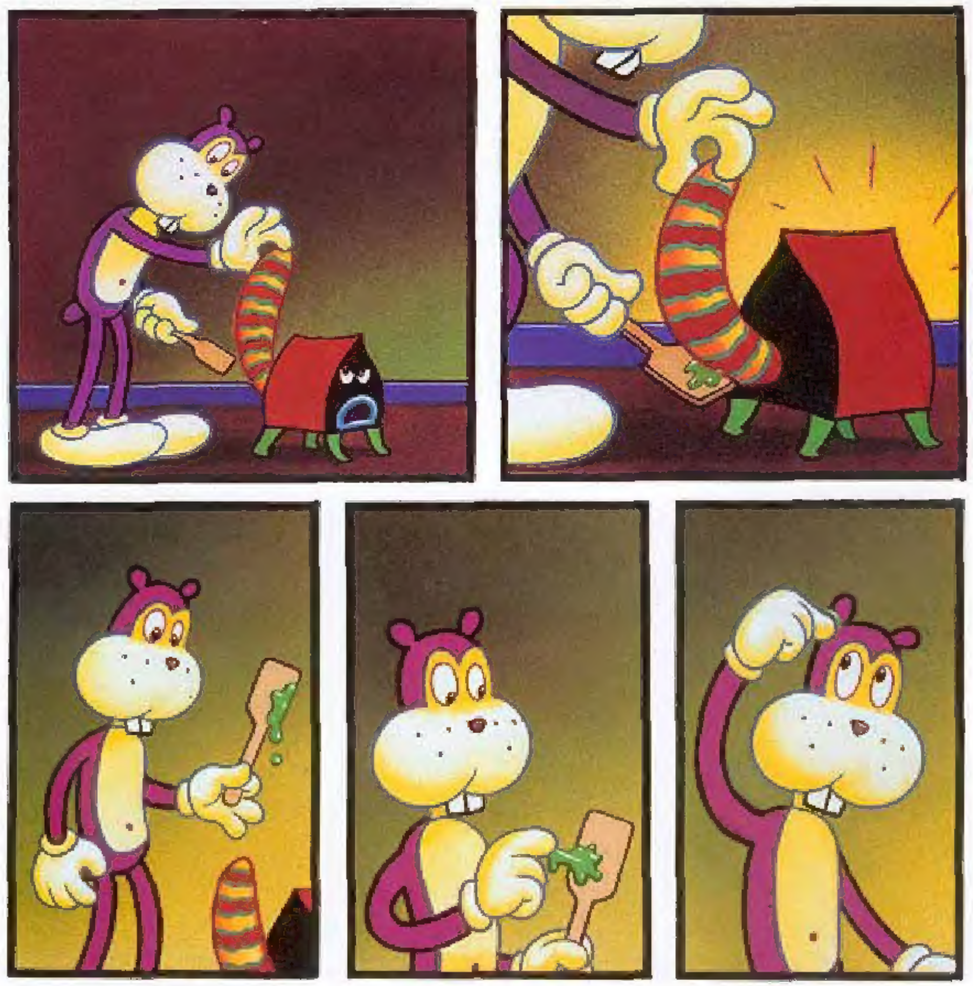
BL: What made you quit drinking?
JW: I just couldn't keep drinking all the time and get all my work done.

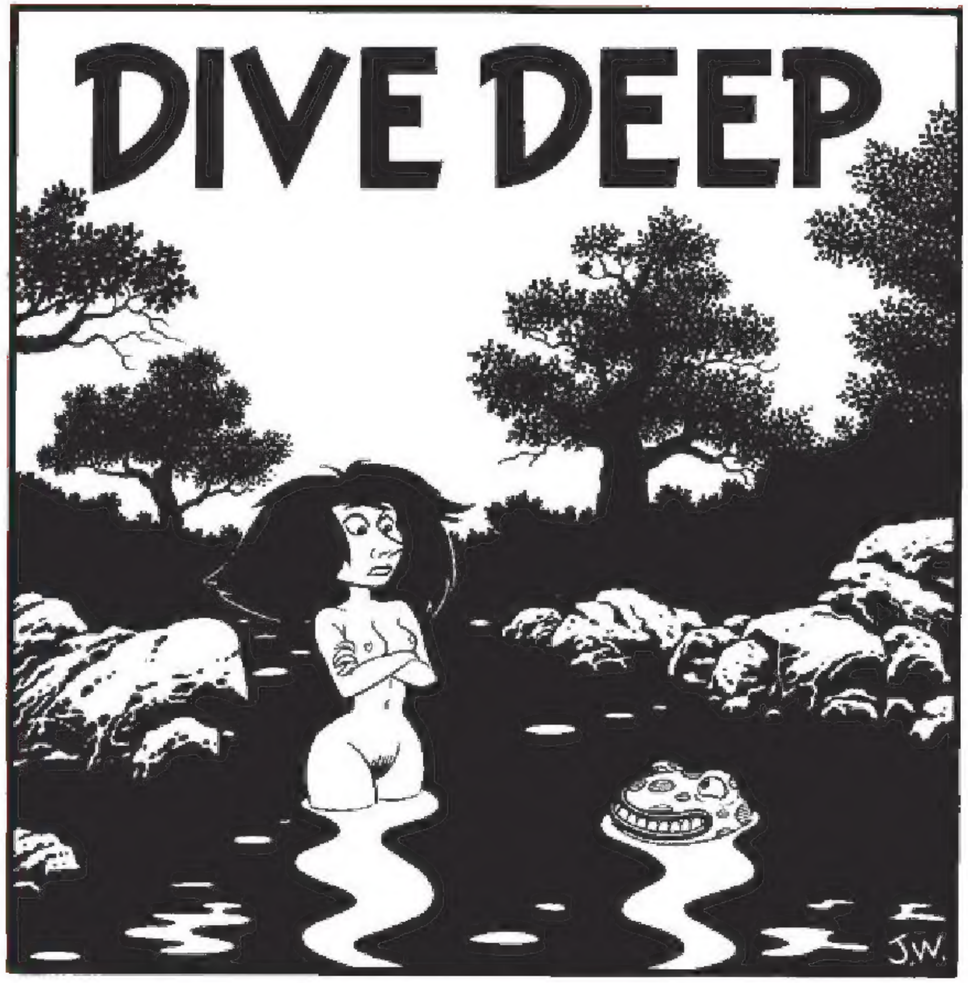
BL: Psychologists and psychoanalysts have analyzed your work, have they ever said anything interesting or true?
JW: All the analyses that I have gotten about my work have been in written form. People see them as patently symbolic. They all have different interpretations of what my stuff is about. Most of it isn't very flattering to me. One common thread is that I have a strong streak of narcissism and infantilism, which I can't disagree with.

BL: Well, you do make comic books.
JW: *[laughs]* But I would rather that remain as subtext, it's strange to have someone stick a label on you.

BL: You never went to art school; did you train yourself or did anyone mentor you?
JW: No, I just trained myself by working at it. It's what I had to do in my life. I didn't have any other distractions or goals so I just focused on that. I think that unless an artist is learning to imitate the surface effects of real innovators, they teach themselves to draw and innovate. Teachers can help, they can give you an environment in which to work and point some things out. But everyone teaches themselves.

BL: Were you really turned down for mental-health counselling?
JW: Yeah, but that story has gotten blown out of proportion a little bit. What happened was that when I was in my early thirties I became aware





of the fact that I had some big blank spots in my memories. I decided I wanted to know what they were. I located and approached some analysts and had a hard time finding one who would deal with me. I found this one woman who was a Freudian analyst and I brought her some of my work. She seemed very interested in it, she called me later and said that she looked over my stuff and decided she didn't want to have me for a patient. It makes a good story but I think the real reason she didn't want me as a patient is because when she looked at my work she realized that I had thought a lot about myself and had already analyzed myself a lot. She may have thought I would play a lot of games with her and that I would be a difficult smartass rather than her being frightened or put off by it.

BL: *You worked on cartoons in the 1980s like* Mr. T*, how did that come up?*
JW: I had a good friend who worked in animation and I wasn't able to find another job or make a living. So he offered a chance to move to Los Angeles and work there, so I did it.

BL: Was that a good time? You were obviously making money.
JW: The money was good and socially it was great. I worked with some of the nicest people and the most talented cartoonists I ever met. But the cartoons themselves were so awful that that was a pain that never went away. Besides *Mr. T*, there was *Rubik the Amazing Cube*, *Turbo Teen*, another one called *Centurions*, *Sectaurs* and *The Puppy's Further Adventures*. But I got to work with Alex Toth, Jack Kirby and Gil Kane - all these great guys.

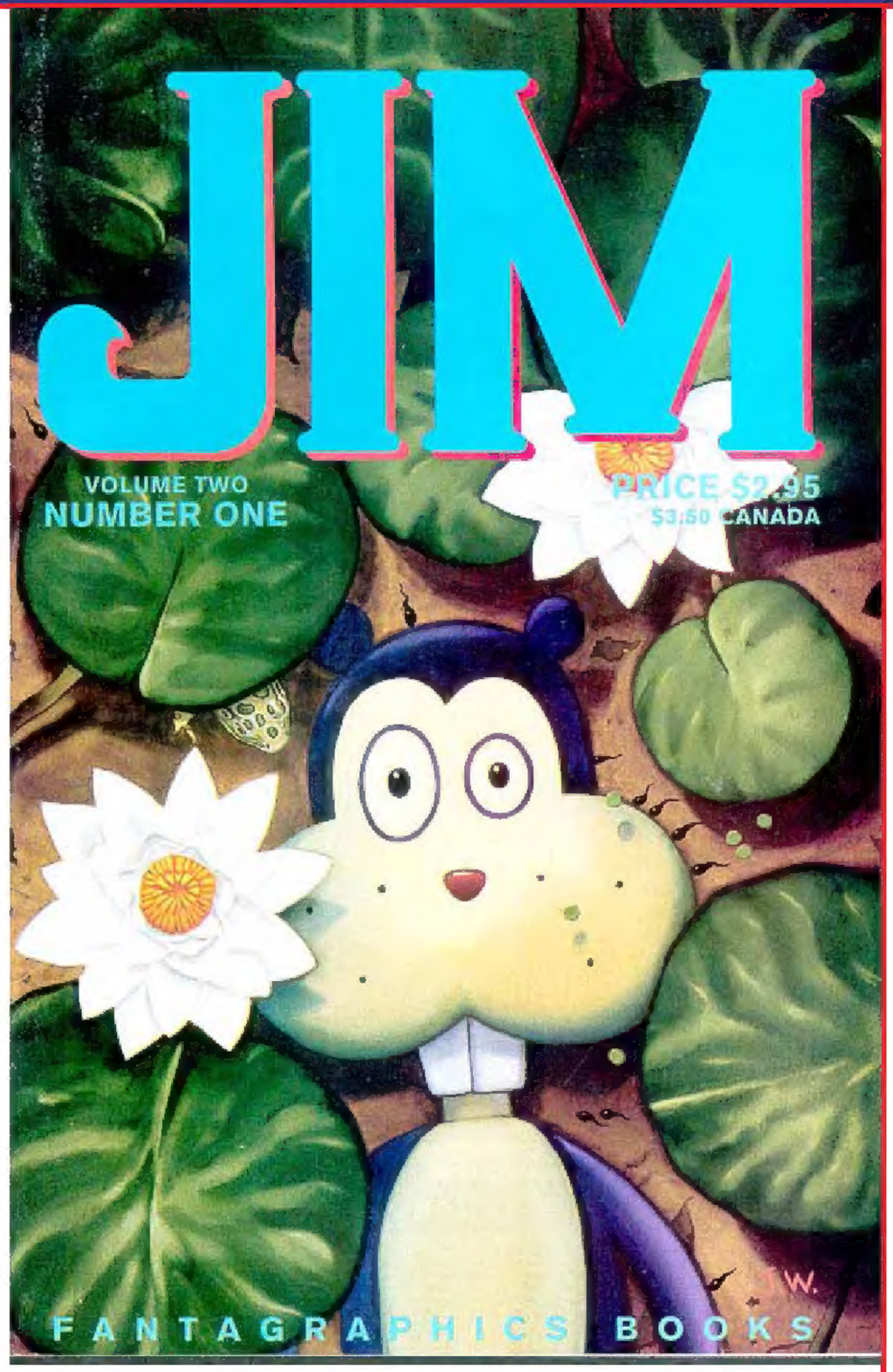
BL: After working with Kirby and Kane, did you ever think about doing mainstream comic books?
JW: No, I was never a mainstream comics fan. When I met Jack Kirby I had heard about him but I didn't realize what a big deal he was. I liked him personally, I got to ink a whole slew of his drawings on crescent board that I did with size 12, series 7 brush. It wasn't until I left the company that I realized that Kirby was a great big deal.

BL: How much of your work is done on computer?
JW: The only thing I do with a computer is I prepare for production. I size it, adjust the contrast, and maybe make little changes in it by doing some soft focus or coloring it. But most of it's all done on paper.

BL: I found a lot of great animated cartoons based on your stuff.
JW: There's one at *www.smolenski.com/* that this guy did on his own to entertain his nieces.

BL: Is cartoons something you want to do or is it too hard on your own?
JW: I would love to be involved with a nice Frank cartoon someday. I made a flash animated Frank cartoon.

BL: It seems like so much of your work is more popular outside



America, what do you think of that?
JW: I can't figure it out. I'm doing pretty well in Japan right now. I was just there in the winter doing a lot of signings. Their take on my work is different from Americans'. They tend to think that the really gross characters I do are really cute and

things that I thought were scary and horrible were funny and sweet. So I don't understand what they see in my work but as long as it continues I'm happy.

BL: As a former garbage man did you ever find anything interesting in the trash?
JW: Oh yeah. I found a beautiful mandolin. All kinds of books, cameras, a saxophone.

BL: You've said you're embarrassed to have worked on the Fritz The Cat *film, why is that?*
JW: It was actually the sequel, *The Nine Lives of Fritz the Cat*. I guess I'm embarrassed because it's such a shitty film and I really respect R. Crumb. He was unhappy to be involved from the beginning.

BL: Are you ever disturbed by your work?
JW: Not by my work, but I am disturbed by the world and the things in it that inspire my work. I've got ideas that I haven't drawn up that disturb me. There's a lot that I don't do that would disturb me. If I've drawn them it doesn't disturb me too much.

BL: You helped discover Serb cartoonists, like Sasa Rakezic - where did you meet him?
JW: He had been corresponding with me before he had become known in the United States because he was interested in dreams and he had seen some of my work. I did what I could to promote him here. I'm a big fan of his work and of him personally. I was in London a few years ago and someone gave me a book of all these unknown cartoonists. There are incredible amounts of Serbian cartoonists who deserve to be better known.

BL: I know Chris Bruce, director of curatorial affairs at the Experience Music Project, is a big fan of yours. How has that relationship helped out?
JW: I've given a talk there and my work has been in shows there. The museum has bought some of my work, but they don't really have art shows unless they are music-related.

BL: You're a big horror film fan. What are your favorite films and horror films?
JW: The first *Alien* movie was a film I loved a lot. I like all the old William Castle and James Whale films. I loved *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*. That's a film I have to steel myself to watch. I really loved *Starship Troopers*; it was fantastic and terribly misunderstood. I also love Matthew Barney's *Cremaster* series, I've only seen one of them but I've seen it four times.

BL: What does your 16-year-old son think of your work?
JW: He's not overwhelmed by it. He kind of likes it. He's a cartoonist himself but he won't let me show him anything. He's 16, y'know? We were watching *The Simpsons* the other night and there was an issue of Jim on the magazine rack in the comic shop. He saw that and freaked out, he thought it was cool.

BL: Recently, more than ever, Marvel and DC have been reaching out to a lot of independent creators. Have you done much work for them?
JW: I worked a little on Evan Dorkin's World's Funnest book and I've done some of their offbeat anthology books. But they haven't asked me to do an issue of Spider-Man like Pete Bagge did.

BL: How do you feel about your place in the industry now?
JW: I guess I don't think about my place in the industry that much. I think about my place on the bookshelf. My whole motivation for doing this is to create books that will be on the shelves of the used bookstore someday and some 16-year-old kid will come in out of the rain looking for something and he will connect with my books. In terms of the industry, I don't really have much of a presence in it. I'm sort of an anomaly. I'm not an established person like the Hernandez brothers or Dan Clowes, I'm more of a scattershot practitioner.

BL: What made you decide to do the Aliens mini series?
JW: Dark Horse offered me the job.

He really seems enchanted by that tiny leg, doesn't he. And there's a gallon of silver paint. Now what? He seems to be having a brainstorm. Now he's... I wonder what's going on outside the shed. I wish we could look out the window. I wonder how many grains of rice there are in a fifty pound sack.

Dan Epstein lives on the Upper West Side of Manhattan in New York City. He is contributor to such websites as Hybridmagazine.com, SlushFactory.com, Ifanboy.com and DavidFincher.net. He has interv ewed such luminaries as Daniel Clowes, Eddie Campbell, Gilbert Shelton, Mike Mignola, Evan Dorkin, Howard Chaykin and Kyle Baker. He is also a former producer for MetroTV where he worked on such shows as *The Daily Beat*, *Studio Y* and *New York Eats* and has worked on such feature films as *Tromeo & Juliet* by the Troma studios and *Dinner and Driving*. He loves referring to himself in the third person. Email him at *danepstein75@hotmail.com*

...GOSH, LIKE, HOW COULD YOU ENTRUST HIM WITH THAT KIND OF RESPONSIBILITY AND POWER? I MEAN, THE MAN'S PRACTICALLY A COMPLETE POLITICAL NEOPHYTE. SOMEBODY WHO NEVER WOULD HAVE EVEN MADE IT THIS FAR WITHOUT THE HELP OF HIS FAMOUS DADDY.
GEEZ! IT'S "W" DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN!
Bill Simon
GOVERNOR
HEY, WHAT'S GOING ON?
THIS GENTLEMAN AND I ARE HAVING A LITTLE POLITICAL DISCUSSION AND DIFFERENCE OF OPINION, NAT.
YOU LIBERALS TRULY AMUSE ME, FOLKS WOULD THINK THAT FAMILY PEOPLE LIKE YOU WOULD AT LEAST BE CONCERNED WITH RAISING YOUR CHILDREN IN A STATE OF DECLINING VALUES AND MORAL DECAY. MY CANDIDATE INTENDS TO ADDRESS THAT SORRY SITUATION. FOR INSTANCE, UNLIKE THE INCUMBENT, HE HAS SIGNED A PLEDGE TO PROTECT MARRIAGE HERE IN CALIFORNIA.
IS THAT SO? "A PLEDGE"? HUH? IS THAT ANYTHING LIKE THE COVENANTS PEOPLE USED TO SIGN PROMISING NOT TO SELL THEIR HOUSE TO A "COLORED" FAMILY?
OF COURSE NOT!...
AND JUST WHAT OR WHOM DOES HE INTEND TO "PROTECT" MARRIAGE FROM? PEOPLE LIKE US? NATALIE AND I BELIEVE IN MARRIAGE. IN FACT, WE'D BOTH LOVE TO BE ABLE TO GET MARRIED — TO EACH OTHER.
HUH?
RUN ALONG 'N' PLAY, OSCAR.
AND, IN FACT, WE THINK YOUR CANDIDATE'S RIVAL, THE INCUMBENT, SHOWED A LOT OF GUTS WHEN HE SIGNED DOMESTIC-PARTNERSHIP LEGISLATION A FEW MONTHS AGO. IT'S SOMETHING NAT'S ROOMMATE, DAVID, AND HIS PARTNER, COLIN, OSCAR'S DADDY, PLAN ON TAKING ADVANTAGE OF SOMETHING IN THE LONG RUN, THAT SHOULD BENEFIT OUR LITTLE FAMILY A GREAT DEAL.
YOU MEAN DAVID EVANS AND COLIN ESPINOSA IN 2-C? THIS YOUNG LADY ISN'T ONE OF "THEIR" ...? BUT THE TWO OF YOU ARE...? AND THE TWO OF THEM... OH MY, JUST LOOK AT THE TIME! EXCUSE ME.
TIGHT-ASSED RIGHT-WING GAS BAG! HE DESERVED TO GET HIS CAGE RATTLED.
WELL, MAYBE, BUT WHO WAS HE AND WHY WAS HE PUTTING UP CAMPAIGN SIGNS IN FRONT OF OUR BUILDING?
YOUR NEW LANDLORD.
OUR NEW LANDLORD — WENDY!?
AW NAT, RELAX! I MEAN, BIG DEAL! AFTER ALL, WHAT CAN HE DO?
IT'S AN EVICTION NOTICE!
TIM BARELA
Leonard and Larry © 2002 Tim Barela www.timbarela.com

LEN & LARRY GET THE AXE

Famous gay sit-com strip is cancelled after more than a decade – the final installment is shrouded in ambiguity and questions over the strip's cancellation...

POPULAR gay strip **Leonard & Larry** has been axed by *Frontiers* newsmagazine after almost 12 years and more than 300 episodes.

Leonard & Larry, created by Tim Barela, followed the lives of a gay couple living in West Hollywood, along with their extended family and friends. The characters were atypical of many comic strips, living in an ironic and sitcom-like world. Bears, leather and uniform fetishism mixed with issues about parenting, the Hollywood closet, gay youth, and the triumphs and troubles of a long-term gay relationship. The final **Leonard & Larry** strip appeared in *Frontiers* #21:1, cover dated May 10, 2002 – ironically with two of the gay characters opening an eviction notice.

Editor Monica Trasandes informed creator Tim Barela of *Frontiers*' decision by letter on April 18, but ambiguity hangs over the reason for the decision.

Borderline attempted to contact the magazine to discuss the decision, but no reply has been received. Barela was surprised at *Frontiers*' decision to cancel the popular series. He said: "I was dismayed and upset by it all. I really wasn't expecting it. **Leonard & Larry** is one of the magazine's main draws, according to the number of hits the strip gets on their website, and the fact that it has run for well over a decade." He also commented: "I was told that some *Frontiers* staffers were heard to comment that this cancellation is an ill-advised decision."

One of the reasons given for the cancellation was the downturn in the economy and slow advertising sales. Barela had not been paid for the previous ten installments at the time the cancellation letter was delivered. Partial payment was tendered on April 26 – the day Barela picked up his final artboards.

Leonard & Larry made its first public appearance in issue #5 (1984) of the *Gay Comix* anthology. After several more stories, the strip was picked up regularly by *The Advocate* with the December 5, 1988 issue, but the series was cancelled with the September 25, 1990 issue due to *The Advocate*'s decision to drop all three of its continuing comic strips. *Frontiers* premiered **Leonard & Larry** – with a line on the cover – in the October 26, 1990 issue, and it has continued in biweekly publication there for almost 12 years.

DreamHaven books has released three **Leonard & Larry** paperbacks – **Domesticity Isn't Pretty**, **Kurt Cobain and Mozart Are Both Dead**, and **Excerpts from the Ring Cycle in the Royal Albert Hall** – with a fourth book, **How Real Men Do It**, due out in late 2002. A stage play of the series was also produced in San Francisco. The strip won an award from the UK's Comics Creators Guild, and was a finalist in the Lambda Literary Awards.

Barela said he hoped to place the strip with other publishers in the future. But he said: "It's going to be really painful not doing the strip; stopping in midstream not because I chose to end things, but because somebody else made the decision for me. There were a lot more stories planned, and now I won't be able to do it unless someone else picks up the strip."

ADVERTISE IN BORDERLINE

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½ page - 135mm x 190mm = £150 ($200)
¼ page - 135mm x 92mm or 67mm x 190mm = £80 ($120)
1/ 5 page - 50mm x 190mm = £65 ($100)
Display Classifieds:
50mm x 90mm = £40 ($65)
50mm x 40mm = £35 ($50)
Banner - 10mm x 275mm = £45 ($75)
BL Gold - Cover banner (15mm x 280mm) + ½ page advert = £500 ($750)
Web banner = £100 per month - minimum of 40,000 hits per month

Contact Phil Hall on
phil.hall@borderline.mediahall.co.uk

BELTRAN'S BUSTY BABES

Here's the large, yet perfectly formed, subject of our girly cover story...

COINCIDING with the Jodorowsky-written *Megalex* serial in **Metal Hurlant**, **TechnoPriests** creator Fred Beltran's art will be showcased in another magazine from Humanoids Publishing this July. Entitled **Metal Hurlant Proudly Presents: Pin-Up Girls From Around The World**, it is essentially a collection of Beltran's pin-up work, with additional help from Ian Sattler, Humanoids' Marketing Manager, and Thierry Frissen, the company's designer. As a bonus, **Pin-Up Girls** will include an exclusive interview in which the artist, whose work sells hundreds of thousands of copies throughout Europe alone, delves into the artistic process by which he achieves the stunning results on the page.

What Hidden Booty Will Some Men Kill For?
A HUMANOIDS PICTURES INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATION
SHE DEVIL SEA DEVILS
Beth STYLES
Shenna-Jo JOHNSTON
Donna EXCITER
&
Ian TRUDER
Directed by JERRY N. FRISSEN - Written By FRED BELTRAN - Produced by F. GIGER

Taking inspiration from pop cultural icons of television, movies, music, comic books and the pin-up books of the 1950s, "layered" is a word Sattler uses to describe the book. "First and foremost, people are going to notice Beltran's art. There is nothing else like it in the world, and it's going to win over a lot of new fans. Past that, it was important that **Pin-Up Girls From Around The World** was different than other art books out there. There is something to notice on every page, whether it be something Beltran hid in the art, where captions are taken from, or what an image is parodying. I know that people won't catch everything right away. There is no filler in this book; it's full of detail. And the girls don't seem to be wearing much clothing, so that's always a plus."

While not his first work in comics – he was a regular writer for the magazine *While You Were Sleeping*, and has done some projects with Jeff Alexander, including last year's indy comic **Literary Graffiti** – this is the first writing gig for Sattler at Humanoids. Speaking exclusively to **Borderline**, he explained: "Humanoids is cool about letting me do a bunch of freelance stuff on the side. I didn't hit **Pin-Ups** cold, but I'm so proud of how great this thing looks."

The project came about after Beltran sent Humanoids a CD full of images for use as pin-ups in **Metal Hurlant**. Sattler spoke to Thierry Frissen about the possibilities of producing a full album of the images, and between them they put together some sample pages and showed them to Beltran: "It turns out that Beltran had always wanted to see a book use his art like this, so he was really supportive of what we were doing. In fact, I felt really honoured that Beltran would let Thierry and I mess with his art so much, but we all seem to have the

same tastes and humor. So after that, Beltran just let Thierry and I go nuts putting the pages together with the design and texts. The main focus was to put out a volume that focused on what a phenomenal artist Beltran is, but to make sure to give the reader some extra stuff to chew on.

"We got over 60 pages from Fred, and either just added text, or in some, we really added a lot. The primary thing was to give each piece some context on the page, and to let Beltran's art really shine. And shine it does. I can't emphasise enough how good Beltran is, you really need to see his stuff to believe it."

By way of describing the man - nay, the *legend* - that is Fred Beltran, Sattler points to the approved biography that will appear on the back of the book: "Fred Beltran is not an easy man to find. The multi-millionaire playboy has a history of never staying in one place for too long, as can be witnessed by his recent two-year hot air balloon trip around the world. Beltran has had many careers over his lifetime: race car driver, the 5th best selling musician of all time, shark hunter, mercenary, president of a lucrative winery, head of the *Beltran 4 Kids* charity, male model, and Olympic water polo champion are just a few of the astonishing accomplishments Beltran has to his name. But now, at long last, he has returned to his true passion: pin-up girls. **Metal Hurlant Presents: Pin-Up Girls From Around The World** is a collection of Beltran's work that was inspired by the many different locales he visited during his globe-spanning balloon trip. Hot on the heels of Beltran's other acclaimed work for Humanoids Publishing, *Megalex* and **The TechnoPriests**, this collection is everything the fans have hoped for and much, much more. Here now is a rare look into the mind of the world's most famous and adored international playboy of art and excitement."

Asked to expand upon the comment that each painting contains hidden depths, Sattler told **Borderline**: "It's ridiculous what [Beltran] can do in Adobe Photoshop. If you zoom in on a lot of the girls, there are little things written in there. Like on the girl who's the police officer. If you zoom in, her badge says 'Fuck The Police'. And then there is the stuff Thierry and I implied with the text. There are so many crazy pop culture references in the book. Nobody will ever get them all. From old movies, to Guns N' Roses, to DJ Shadow, to Boba Fett, to comics, there is so much in there. We made every effort to fill the book with as much as we could, so it wouldn't just be some lame 'look at all the boobs' fiasco. **Pin-Up Girls From Around The World** is a funny book. It's all done with a sense of humor. I guarantee everybody out there that there is *nothing* else like this around. Everybody needs to buy three copies. And I also want to note that **Pin-Up Girls From Around The World** is a great thing to show your friends who may not be comics fans, and that women will really get the humor in it. It's one of them 'cross-over' books we've been hearing so much about."

After the release of **Pin-Up Girls**, Beltran will next be "going on tour with his band, a bunch of naked dancing girls and some monster trucks" when he's not working on the *Megalex* serial in **Metal Hurlant**. As for Sattler himself, he has his own plans: "Yeah, I'm writing a technical book called **Covering Up Nudity The Humanoids Way**, that I'm sure everybody is going to love."

Asked to sum up the experience of working on this project, Sattler reminisced: "Creating **Pin-Up Girls From Around The World** had a funny effect on our offices in LA. People were scared to come near Thierry and I because of all the nudie magazines and tiki drinks we were using for reference. That, and all the spaghetti western music and Swedish Death Metal we were listening to, to get that 'from around the world' vibe down. I think some people were happy when we were finished with it. I think some of the better stories will come when we see people's reactions to the book. No joke, I think the day it comes out, folks will be choking on their food, both from shock and amusement."

***Pin-Up Girls From Around The World** goes on sale in July, with 64 pages in a hardcover album format, priced US$15.95*

EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW THINGS

Borderline spans the world, and Borderline spans the web. It's always looking and always learning. So when Danny Black stumbled across Kyle's Bed And Breakfast, we pushed him through the door and demanded a room for the night...

THE GREG FOX INTERVIEW

I'M not the best person to send out on a fact-finding mission, I admit that. I like spandex-clad superheroes and I'm ashamed to say that I don't venture far beyond that. But even I was curious when I was shown the YahooGroup for **Kyle's Bed and Breakfast**, the online comic strip by Greg Fox at <*http://members.aol.com/KylesBnB/*> .

My previous knowledge of gay comics started and ended with a few copies of David Kelly's **Steven's Comics** and some old issues of Jeremy Dennis' small press series **3 in a Bed** – I've never avoided gay comics, but I've never made any effort to hunt them down. So I lurked on the internet message group and soaked up the atmosphere, and I soon realised that there's no such thing as a "good gay comic" – there are just good comics – and **Kyle's Bed and Breakfast** is a prime example of this. It doesn't matter if a comic is written for someone who is gay; if the writing and art are good then it's a good comic. And hey, I'm interested in good comics! God knows I've read enough bad ones!

A story about a gay Bed and Breakfast may seem a long way removed from Gotham, Metropolis or New York, but don't think there's any less drama than in those locales! The story of Brad, Lance, Kyle, Eduardo and Richard might not contain super-villains but it has stories that'll get you hooked. So **Borderline** got in contact with the man behind the B&B...

BL: Before we get onto Kyle's B&B, can you tell me how you arrived there? What had you produced before that people should look out for?

Greg Fox: Well, I had about a five-year run in the comicbook industry, where I pretty much worked on a series of lesser known comicbooks. This was in the early '90s, when independent companies were in full force, and I figured the best way to break into the industry was to take whatever job I could get. So, I drew some shlocky biography comics for a notoriously shady publishing company that I don't want to mention because they don't deserve the publicity; also, a book called Doctor Chaos for Triumphant Comics, who,

Kyle's Bed & Breakfast by Greg Fox

14
OKAY, GUYS...NOW THAT YOU FOUR HAVE OFFICIALLY BEEN CHOSEN AS "4EVER TRUE"...
...THE NEXT BOY BAND THAT'S GOING TO TAKE THE WORLD BY STORM...WE NEED TO WORK ON YOUR PRESS BIOS.
WE WANT YOU EACH TO FILL OUT THESE QUESTIONNAIRES. THEY'RE THE TYPE OF QUESTIONS THE TEEN MAGS ALWAYS ASK.
"WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE COLOR?" THAT'S EASY.
BLUE. THE COLOR OF MY EYES. AND MY BRIEFS.
HOW STUCK UP.
"WHAT'S YOUR ZODIAC SIGN"?
TAURUS. THE BULL.
THAT WHY YOU'RE SO FULL OF IT?
SHUT UP.
HEY, WAIT A MINUTE. "WHAT KIND OF GIRLS DO YOU LIKE?"
I CAN'T ANSWER THAT.
WHY NOT, EDUARDO?
'CAUSE I'M GAY.
WHAT DID YOU SAY, EDUARDO?
I'M GAY.
EDUARDO...COME IN THE OFFICE. NOW.
WHAT'S UP?
YOU ARE NEVER, EVER TO SAY THAT YOU'RE GAY AGAIN WHILE YOU ARE A PART OF THIS BAND! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

unfortunately, were less than "triumphant" in the marketplace; a quickie 8-page story for Marvel called NFL Quarterback Club (yes, it was as bad as it sounds). Thankfully, I had my own comic strip running simultaneously with these books... a strip called Manic Music, about a rock band/music store scenario, which actually ran for 6 years in an international music trade publication.

BL: How long does it take you to write and draw the strip? Do you find yourself rushing to beat your own deadlines?
GF: The strip is biweekly (which means, it's sometimes 3 times a month). It takes up to 18 hours to produce one episode of the strip. I am trying to build a larger "comfort zone" between me and my deadlines, yet I do occasionally run into those situations where I'm working down to the last possible second. Thankfully, that happens less and less these days, as I am really starting to keep ahead of things.
BL: How are you treated by your comics peers - are you getting invited out for lunch by the big companies and being asked to do that next X-Men project?
GF: Oh, yes, I wish they'd stop bothering me to do that next X-Men project!!! <grin> Truthfully, I don't know quite how I'm viewed by the big companies, or if they even know I exist... although, privately, there are several "big names" in the comics industry who follow the strip religiously and send me the nicest emails. Let's face it, I don't know that DC or Marvel are clamouring to publish the type of material I do, (which is basically comedy/drama/romance comics, of the decidedly non-superheroic, very gay-populated type). Although maybe they should, as I have a pretty fanatical and large readership that cuts across a wide variety of age groups, genders, sexual orientations and countries around the world. Theoretically, if by some bizarre chance they offered me the opportunity to write and draw one of their titles... like Green Lantern or something... I'd probably say yes, assuming I had the right amount of creative control and also if it didn't interfere with Kyle's B&B, which is my first priority.

BL: Can you tell me a little more about Rock The House?
GF: This is essentially a continuation of the comic strip Manic Music that I did for 6 years in the early to mid 1990s. Around 1999, I received an offer from a music magazine to revive the strip. I was already pretty busy launching Kyle's B&B at that point, but I went ahead and created Rock the House, which features some of the key characters from Manic Music, now sharing a house together and involved in a struggling rock band. Unfortunately, the magazine that offered to publish it went out of business after only 2 episodes had been published. I created a website for the strip, and posted all the episodes I had drawn thus far of it (four), but at this point the strip is in limbo, because I haven't had the impetus to keep it going without a magazine publishing it, and Kyle's B&B has really become my main focus.

BL: Where are you drawing inspiration from? Are there any TV programmes, films, music or situations that inspire subject matter for the strip?
GF: I'd say TV more than anything. Those really quality shows from years back, that are both drama & comedy... like *L.A. Law* and *thirtysomething* and *Northern Exposure*. And also, perhaps there's a little streak of Aaron Spelling running through everything I do. What can I say, I grew up on the man's TV shows... from *Charlie's*

BUT I--
LISTEN... WE'RE INVESTING BIG MONEY IN THIS PROJECT. WE'RE AIMING AT AN ADOLESCENT FEMALE MARKET. THAT MARKET DOES NOT WANT TO HEAR THAT A BAND MEMBER DOESN'T LIKE GIRLS! GOT THAT?!
I GOT IT. JEEZ.
IF YOU CAN'T HANDLE THAT, WE'LL REPLACE YOU NOW, BEFORE WE WASTE ANY MORE TIME OR MONEY.
NO, I...
...I CAN HANDLE IT.
FOR NOW.
GOOD. ALL RIGHT, LET'S GET THAT QUESTIONNAIRE FINISHED.
"WHAT KIND OF GIRLS DO YOU LIKE?".
ONES THAT LOOK LIKE JOSH HARTNETT.
EDUARDO...

Angels through *Dynasty* through *90210* through *Melrose Place*. It's sort of in my blood!

BL: What with the recent run of comics-based films, if a studio offered you a deal to take KB&B to the big screen - would you accept? And who would you like producing it and starring in it?
GF: I'd jump at the chance! I get asked a lot about what actors I'd cast as the characters in the strip; part of me feels it should be unknown actors. But if I had to go with big names, well... there are a few I'd choose for Kyle. Maybe Rob Lowe, possibly Dylan McDermott, or perhaps Tom Everett Scott. For the longest time, I couldn't imagine who could play Brad... but then, I saw an actor named Bryce Johnson, who played a character named Josh Ford on a short-lived TV series called *Popular*, and I was stunned at what a match he is for Brad. The other characters, well... no definite ideas in mind at this time... but I am constantly seeing actors in some movie or TV show and thinking, 'he would be *great* to play so-and-so!'.

BL: How long do you see yourself staying in the comics business, and do you have an ending planned for KB&B?
GF: I desire to keep doing this strip for years and years and years... 'til I am in my 80s, and beyond. Seriously! I just love the characters and the concept, and would love to see these characters through many, many years of growth.

BL: How are the sales of the collected edition going? Are we going to see a second volume soon?
GF: Sales are going great, but it's really only a slim volume, of the first dozen episodes. I am looking to get a book deal to publish the second volume, that will hopefully contain the first 3 years or more of the strip, on which, at this point, I am up to 77 episodes with more coming as we speak. Readers are constantly writing me to ask when the next volume's coming out... I wish I could give a definite date, but I need to get a firm deal with a publisher. Stay tuned!

BL: Marvel goes bust tomorrow and Joe Quesada offers you ownership of a character. Who do you pick, and why?
GF: Captain America. How I would love to reveal that the big, blond, all-American hero is a closet homosexual! Damn, I think he'd finally have an interesting book if I was writing it.

BL: What comics are you reading and enjoying at the moment?
GF: Not many. I hate to sound jaded, but so much of it either bores me or has artwork I cannot stand. Green Lantern's not bad... Wonder Woman's been somewhat interesting. Birds of Prey was great, but since the original artist left it leaves me cold. The way artists and writers are shifted around in the industry is truly tragic, in my opinion.

It destroys any sense of reader loyalty. At least, for me it does. The only book I've absolutely loved over the past 5 years was when George Perez was drawing Avengers.

BL: Any views on Apollo and Midnighter's portrayal in The Authority?
GF: I haven't seen it recently, but I did read the original issues a couple of years back, and I greatly appreciated how it was handled so matter-of-factly that they're a gay couple, instead of making it a big issue. Nicely done.

BL: How hard is it to develop the characters in KB&B using the current format?
GF: I guess, ideally, it would be easier were it weekly, but I manage pretty well, I think. I'm lucky I have a full page, 10 panels, as opposed to a little 4-panel comic strip.

BL: Ferrelli in KB&B - I get the feeling there's a lot more to this character... Any clues?
GF: Well, he is going to show he's more than just a stereotypical Brooklyn tough-guy soon. We will see another side of him. And also, we'll find out why he's so angry all the time. You know, growing up here in the New York City area, this tough-guy character seems so natural to me. A lot of readers have written and asked why he's so harsh, or whatever. Well, part of that is just that NY attitude that you kind of encounter here on a daily basis. It's in your face, but it's honest. That's Nick Ferrelli.

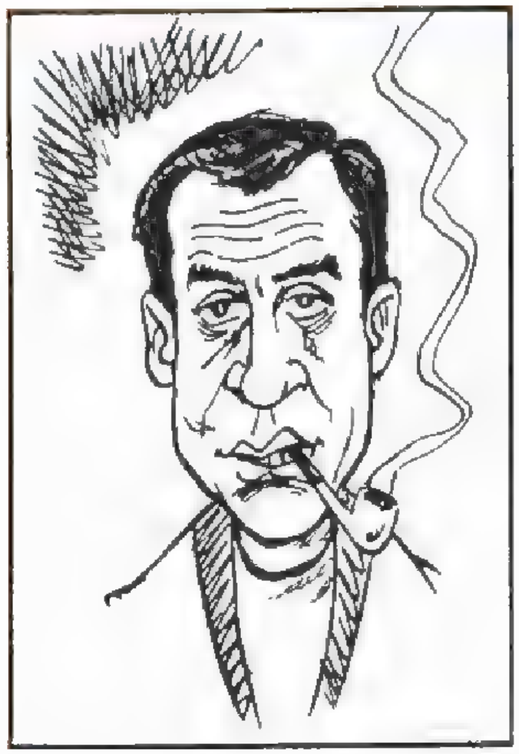
BL: And finally, what is the one thing you'd like to be asked in an interview? ☺

GF: Who is my favorite artist outside of comics? That'd probably be Norman Rockwell, followed closely by Michelangelo.

BL: Thanks, Greg!

Net discussion link: *http://groups.yahoo.com/group/KylesPlace*

ROBERT KANIGHER



ROBERT KANIGHER, DC writer and editor from 1947 to 1988, passed away on May 6 at the age of 87.

Born in 1915, Kanigher began to develop a career as a writer in the late 1930s, turning out short stories and radio plays. In 1940 he added comics to his itinerary, working on many titles ranging from one of his earliest creations, **Steel Sterling** for MLJ, to Fawcett's **Captain Marvel**. By 1943 he was confidently writing the bestselling book **How to Make Money Writing for Comics** – he also wrote a similar volume pertaining to radio.

At the end of 1946 Kanigher was hired by editor Sheldon Mayer to work on the All-American Comics line-up of superheroes, and began turning out scripts featuring The Flash, Green Lantern, Hawkman and the JSA. He soon demonstrated a flair for creating villainesses, for a company not notably replete with female characters; amongst his significant 1940s creations were Rose and the Thorn, Star Sapphire, The Harlequin and one who was soon transmuted into a heroine, Black Canary.

In 1947 Mayer switched from editing to freelancing, and his protégé Kanigher was offered one of his key editing assignments, **Wonder Woman**. The series' writer and creator William Moulton Marston having died in June 1947, Kanigher accepted the job on condition that he was also hired to write the Wonder Woman stories in **Sensation Comics** and her own title. He was to write every Wonder Woman story for the next twenty years.

From 1952 his other principal workload began to develop when DC started producing war comics during the Korean conflict; **Our Army At War**, **All-American Men of War** and **Star-Spangled War Stories** were launched in August of that year, with **Our Fighting Forces** being added in October 1954 and **G.I. Combat,** taken over from Quality Comics, in late 1956. Kanigher dominated them all, becoming de facto DC's chief writer/editor of war stories. Meanwhile, though, he was still writing and editing **Wonder Woman**, as well as the complete run of **Rex the Wonder Dog**. In late summer 1956 his single most famous and most often reprinted script was published in **Showcase #4**; the first appearance of the Silver Age Flash and the story most often credited with beginning DC's Silver Age. Little more than a year later, Kanigher's own most famous creation, the incredibly tough but compassionate Army stalwart Sgt. Rock, made his first appearance in the pages of **G.I. Combat**.

Writing and editing the unlikely combination of **Wonder Woman** and the hard-bitten war comics took up most of Kanigher's time until 1968. However, he still managed to create memorable series in **Sea Devils**, **Suicide Squad** and, most notably, **Metal Men**, the latter reputedly created over the course of a weekend to plug a sudden gap in the scheduling of **Showcase**.

When the ownership and management of DC changed in 1968 Kanigher opted to surrender both his editorial post and the scripting of **Wonder Woman**, but became even more prolific as a freelance writer. Perhaps because he was regarded as DC's most experienced writer and creator of female characters, he took on the scripting of both **Lois Lane** and the *Supergirl* series in **Adventure Comics**, continuing to work off and on with both series until the mid-1970s. He continued to write the war books, and his name began to appear in series right across the DC line - for a fleeting moment he was even to be found at Marvel, scripting **Iron Man #44** before beating a hasty retreat back to DC.

At the end of 1973 he resumed his editorial post, sharing duties on the war books with artist Joe Kubert and, for a while, writing and editing **Wonder Woman**, **Lois Lane** and the new **Supergirl** title. By 1975, though, he was concentrating on the war titles, with occasional writing forays afield such as *Tarzan* stories, and the short-lived series **Ragman**. In the late 1970s he often contributed to DC's remaining horror and mystery series; in 1984 he freelanced briefly for Archie on new tales of his own early creation, **Steel Sterling**. In the mid-1980s he took on his last "new" female character in **Elvira's House of Mystery**. At the end of 1988, with the cancellation of the last DC war series (**Sgt. Rock**, the final issue being #422), he retired.

Robert Kanigher's career was a study in startling contrasts. One of DC's long term mainstays, he was also a maverick; a writer/editor at a company where editors, until the 1970s, didn't write. His two great specialities were comics aimed primarily at girls and tough, violent war stories. A martinet to his freelancers, his own scripts were often knocked out overnight and were sometimes barely coherent. Throughout his career he insisted that his job was to produce good stories, yet his idea of narrative seemed to constantly take second place to an almost abstract sense of plot design in which a balancing of structural building blocks overruled narrative coherence. Above all, as his war stories exemplified, he was a tough, no-nonsense sentimentalist who never allowed the gung-ho action of his battlefield epics to obscure the fact that his warrior protagonists, on either side, were men who would rather be doing anything other than fighting.

By the end he was the last of the great Golden Age mainstream writers. Characterisation and continuity were never of the slightest interest to him; his stories were like improvisations, a shifting of elements to make interesting patterns, regardless of whether the process of arriving at those patterns made much sense. The results were often infuriating, even silly, but just as often dazzling and delightful. Without him the American mainstream comicbook has lost a special, unique kind of magic.

BUT US GUYS OF EASY KNOW IT WAS THE KID'S FIGHTIN' HEART THAT BROKE DOWN STEEL! THAT HE WAS AN EASY MAN-- BEFORE HE EVEN JOINED EASY!
YEAH -- THAT'S THE WAY IT IS IN EASY COMPANY -- WHERE NOTHIN' IS EASY!
THE End
13

DAVE BERG

AMERICAN comicbook artist and cartoonist Dave Berg passed away on May 16, following a prolonged struggle with cancer.

Born in 1920, Berg studied art alongside many fledgling Golden Age artists at the Pratt Institute and the Art Students' League in New York. He entered the comics industry in 1941, working on Quality Comics' projects such as drawing backgrounds for Will Eisner's **The Spirit** and taking over the *Death Patrol* series in **Military Comics** after creator Jack Cole moved on. During 1941-2 he also worked briefly on Fawcett's Captain Marvel and produced a number of humour strips for publishers such as Western and Fiction House.

From 1942 to 1945 Berg was in military service. Subsequently he worked primarily for Timely/Atlas until 1958, writing, drawing and editing almost the entirety of their **Combat Kelly** title and contributing to many more of their war titles but also to horror series such as **Strange Tales** and **Astonishing**. For a while he also edited Timely's teen humour title **Georgie**. Around 1952 he drew children's fantasy comics for Ziff-Davis and the occasional piece for EC.

Thus Dave Berg was an experienced comicbook professional who worked in most of the prominent genres of the pre-Silver Age era. However, he will be remembered best by millions of readers, spanning several generations, for a rather different kind of comics art: *The Lighter Side Of...* feature in **Mad Magazine**.

Berg had been drawing gag cartoons for **Mad** since 1956, but with the debut of *The Lighter Side Of...* in 1961 he established for himself a unique niche as a creator of gentle but pointed social satire and as one of the magazine's best loved and most distinctive contributors. For almost four decades he took an everyday social topic, be it teenage dating rituals, street crime or anything in between, and each month filled four pages with three or four panel gag strips in which ordinary people expressed extreme, ludicrous but never fantastic viewpoints on the matter. Seventeen paperback collections of the feature were published by Signet Books.

Although a number of characters and many types recurred in *The Lighter Side Of...*, few were used constantly or identified by name. The notable exception was Roger Kaputnik; an aging hipster type in a belted safari jacket, pipe clenched between his teeth, eyebrows forever arching in surprise above square-rimmed spectacles, he symbolised the American father figure's struggles to come to terms with social change and, above all, the generation gap. Always attempting to relate to the kids on their own terms, always confused by how others' value systems conflicted with his own, though not necessarily in the most obvious ways, Kaputnik was Berg's supreme satirical creation. He was also a caricature of Berg himself; the cartoonist as social critic but also as an object of critical examination.

That's a rather expensive-looking slide rule! Where did you get it?
I stole it from school!
You—you STOLE it?!? What's happening in this country?!? There's a total moral breakdown! These are the first days of the LAST days! Don't you know it's dishonest to steal?!?
If you wanted a slide rule that badly, why didn't you TELL me!?
I would've brought one home from the OFFICE!!

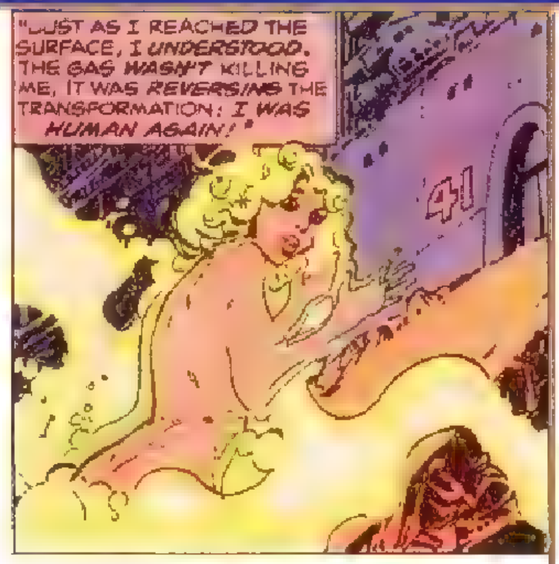
TOM SUTTON

COMICBOOK artist and book illustrator Tom Sutton passed away early in May, at the age of 65.

Born in North Adams, Boston MA in 1937, Sutton served in the United States Air Force and worked on the Forces newspaper *Stars And Stripes*, for which he drew his own strip, Johnny Craig. After leaving the service, he studied at the School of the Boston Museum and worked as an art director in advertising and animation before moving to New York, where he fulfilled his childhood ambition by entering the comics industry, in 1967.

Sutton worked for Marvel Comics on such disparate series as the Mad-style humour comic Not Brand Ecch - for which he produced excellent "bigfoot" art in almost every issue - and the westerns Kid Colt Outlaw and Rawhide Kid. Highlights of his early 1970s Marvel work included stints on Werewolf by Night, Man-Thing and Ghost Rider, of which he pencilled the first issue - and also his atmospheric art on The Beast's solo series in Amazing Adventures. At the same time, he was also producing regular work for Joe Orlando at DC Comics and for Archie Goodwin at Warren Publications.

After 1972 he focussed increasingly on work for Charlton's various mystery and horror titles, notably including Haunted and Ghostly Haunts. Sutton took advantage of the greater stylistic freedom allowed creators by that publisher to produce comics that reflected his long-time admiration of H.P. Lovecraft. Although his art


"JUST AS I REACHED THE SURFACE, I UNDERSTOOD. THE GAS WASN'T KILLING ME, IT WAS REVERSING THE TRANSFORMATION: I WAS HUMAN AGAIN!"

suffered somewhat from Charlton's low production standards, this was the work of his that remains most treasured by his fans.

Although he may have been pouring his heart and soul into his Charlton stories, Sutton continued to work frequently for Marvel. In 1976-7 he drew a brief but memorable run of Planet of the Apes, in 1978 he pencilled Dr. Strange for a while, and in 1979 he was able to combine his "bigfoot" and horror styles in the hilariously demented Marvel Premiere #50, featuring rock star Alice Cooper.

During the 1980s Sutton worked on numerous First Comics titles and DC mystery and SF series. However, for much of the decade he had the steadiest, most high profile and perhaps most unexpected gig of his career, pencilling the majority of DC's Star Trek series. In the 1990s he focussed less on comics and more on book illustration; one of his last published assignments was John Carnell's Roadkill of Middle Earth.

Although he may not have been a fan favourite except to connoisseurs of horror comics, Tom Sutton's versatility, speed and reliability endeared him to many an editor, and his idiosyncratic touch enlivened many a comic during the last two decades of the letterpress era.

IT'S A POLISH THING

Poland isn't just about beetroots, spies, goalkeeping heroes and shipyards, you know...

POLSKI PULP

Barney Berns looks back at Polish comics during the Communist era

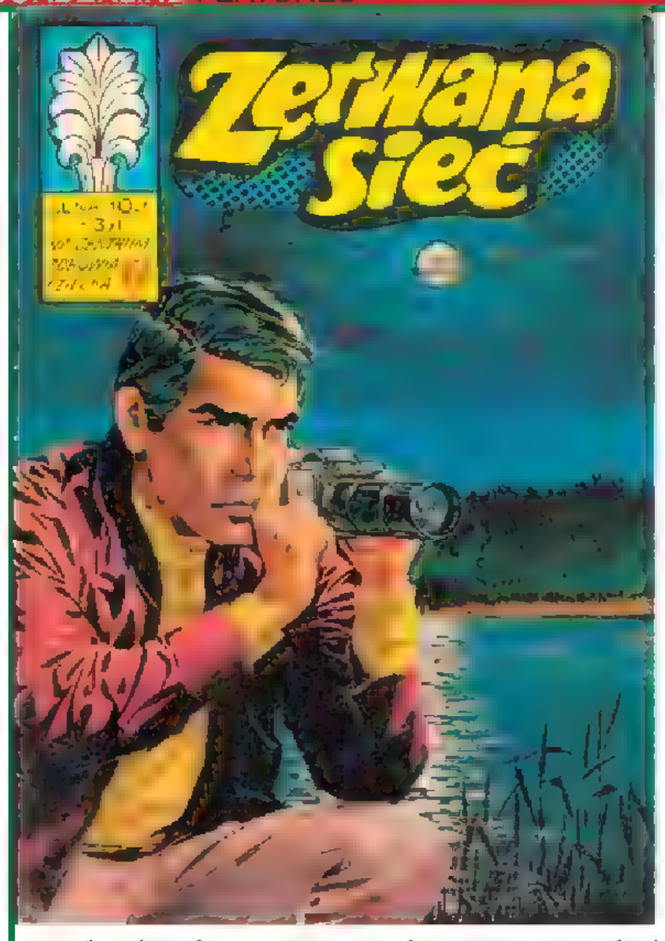
FOR the communists, comics were a kind of visual rock'n'roll: opium for the masses, symbol of capitalist culture, and generally counter-revolutionary stuff that had to be suppressed. So while there had never been a particularly strong tradition of funnies in pre-war Poland, what had existed was almost completely discontinued afterwards. Zbigniew Lengren's **Profesor Filutek**, very similar in style to the Scandinavian **Adamson** series, was one of a few that survived as short strips in newspapers. Comics also found a preserve in kiddie books, namely the adventures of **Koziolek Matolek** (**Goofy Goat**) or **Fiki-Miki** by K. Makuszynski and M. Walentinowicz. These fantastic colourful stories, accompanied by four-line rhymes, sold in hundreds of thousands, often running through several impressions.

Donald Duck, Clark Kent or Tom & Jerry rarely made it into Poland - if they did, it was probably in some diplomat's luggage or in the boot of a rusty Lada – and otherwise, homegrown talent had no chance to publish.

It took the communists until the late 1960s to realize that a medium so attractive to children and teenagers all over the world also carried excellent propaganda value; the result was some of Poland's most successful pulp fiction. Generations of kids devoured **Tytus, Romek i A'Tomek**, about a chimp and his human friends, which appeared in the scout newspaper *Zwiat Mlodych* (*World of the Young*). The strip only ran out of print for a short time under martial law. The late 1960s also saw the birth of two very popular series: **Kapitan Kloss** and **Kapitan Zbik**. The former, set during the German occupation, centred around the intrepid figure of Kloss, undercover captain of the Polish People's Army in a German uniform, fighting the enemy single-handed on the home front, with a little help from some equally heroic compatriots. This guy really kicked ass with the fascists, and even though a lot of the "facts" didn't quite meet today's scientific standards, the message was evident: that this is how we won the war, against those swastika-wearing barbarians.

NASTĘPNEGO DNIA...
BACZNOŚĆ ! CZY WSZYSCY CZŁONKOWIE KLUBU OBECNI ?
TAK JEST !
A WIĘC ZACZYNAMY ĆWICZENIA.
TYTUS
PRZYSZŁY ASTRONAUTA MUSI UMIEĆ JEŚĆ Z TUBKI W KAŻDEJ POZYCJI CIAŁA.
FE ! ALE TO PASTA DO ZĘBÓW
TRUDNO. NIC LEPSZEGO NIE MIELIŚMY POD RĘKĄ.
PRZYSZŁY ASTRONAUTA MUSI ZACHOWAĆ TRZEŹWOŚĆ UMYSŁU W KAŻDEJ SYTUACJI. ILE JEST 6:2 ?
TRZRZ... TRZ... TRZY!
PRZYSZŁY ASTRONAUTA MUSI BYĆ ODPORNY NA WSZELKIE NIEWYGODY DZISIEJSZĄ NOC SPĘDZISZ NA OKRUSZKACH.
?

Kloss engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the SS and the Abwehr until the Communist system crumbled, even gaining popularity in Sweden and Denmark. Kapitan Zbik, on the



other hand, was very much a man of the present, and his presence was clearly modelled on James Bond - minus the flash scenery, the hi-tech gizmos and Ursula Andress, of course. Instead of foiling mad scientists determined to destroy the earth, this communist 007 in a Polski Fiat fought spies and class enemies, taking the time to admire the wonderful housing projects in places like Bydgoscsz on his way. In one episode, Zbik even discovers an American submarine in the Mazurian lakes: credibility ruled OK in 1974.
Unsurprisingly, the whole series was a confidence trick steered by the People's Militia (Milicja Obywatelska), and every issue bore its coat of arms on the cover.

While Kloss and Zbik did their ideological work at home, a Polish artist living in Switzerland sidestepped the recent past and sticky present altogether. As drawn by Grzegorz Rosinski (with a storyline by Jean van Hamme), **Thorgal** told the story of an alien child who becomes a Viking warrior. First published in France and Belgium in the mid-1970s, the series was popular with both audiences and critics, winning several awards. Today, it's still one of the best selling comics in Poland, while Rosinski's popularity in the western European market remains unabated, with recent successes including a lush, downbeat story of late 19th century America, **Western** (again, scripted by Van Hamme).

When the Iron Curtain came down, the careers of Kloss and Zbik were over. Illegal black and white copies of Super-, Bat- and Spider-Man flooded the street bazaars, followed by official copies of strips featuring all the usual international superhero suspects and Manga characters. Along with the flash flood of foreign comics, the Kloss-and-Zbik vacuum has been filled by graduates of Poland's art schools, using new styles and tones ranging from vulgar anarchism to artful refinement. Good Polish comic artists are already too numerous to list - a good sign that the art form is finally catching up here - but two of the most outstanding are Krzysztof Gawronkiewicz and Dennis Wojda, creators of **Mikropolis**. Their strip is printed in mainstream papers, comic magazines and fanzines alike, and has its own website [*http://www.mikropolis.com.pl/*].

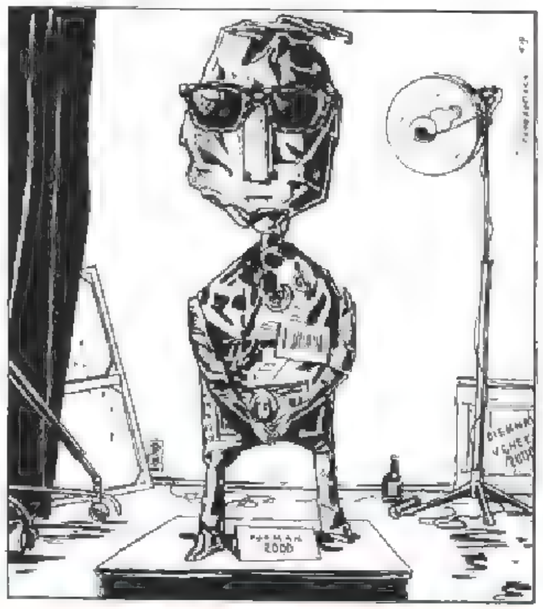
The secret war is finally over. Zbik is probably an elderly gentleman today, casting his line - this time for fish - in the lakes, and, well, Rest In Peace, Kapitan Kloss.

CASE STUDY: POLISH COMICS

Nowadays several new Polish comic albums are published every month. Two years ago Egmont Poland, the biggest comic publisher in Poland, published ***The Polish Comic Anthology****, presenting the work of Poland's younger comic creators, illustrators and scriptwriters who debuted in the 1990s. Eleven years have passed since the first organized comic gathering in Kielce. Witold Tkaczyk - critic, journalist and chief editor of the comic magazine* ***AQQ*** *- takes a closer look across Polish comics, and journalism made on the subject, created in the last 12 or 13 years.*

POLITICS AND BOOK PUBLISHING

A TURNING point in the modern history of Polish comics came in 1987, with the launch of the magazine **Komiks-Fantastyka**. This monthly magazine, mainly focused on SF and fantasy, was the first periodical paper completely dedicated to comics since 1981, when **Relax** was closed because of the martial law in Poland - on December the 13, 1981 a military junta had taken over power, ending the Solidarity period (1980-1981). In 1989 people from the Solidarity movement won the semi-free election and gained seats in the Parliament. The new Solidarity/Communist government decided to introduce capitalism into Poland. **Komiks-Fantastyka** published some interesting foreign comics (Christin and Mézières' **Valerian**, Haldeman and Marvano's **Eternal War**, Don Lawrence's **Storm**, Segur and Ortiz' **Burton & Cyb**). The magazine also published two comics, **Thorgal** and **Hans**,



LOOK!
GOOD GOLLY! IT'S A..
IT'S A WILD CHAIR!
IT'S SO SMALL MUST BE VERY YOUNG
DO YOU THINK IT LIVES HERE IN THE FOREST ALL BY ITSELF?
ALONE WITHOUT PARENTS? OH MAN!
WE CAN'T JUST LET IT STAY HERE.
I'VE ALWAYS WANTED A PET...
OH YEAH? YOUR GRANDMA WILL BE THRILLED
GRANDMA!!
WE FOUND IN OUT IN THE WOOD.
OH DEAR!
WICKED CHILDREN! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? DO YOU WISH TO BRING MISFORTUNE TO OUR HOUSE? YOU CAN'T JUST GO AND TAKE A WILD CHAIR OUT OF THE FOREST. IT HAS TO RETURN TO ITS NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
ALL RIGHT BOYS! -LET'S RETURN IT TO THE FOREST...
I'M AFRAID IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE THE CHAIR HAS LOST ITS NATURAL ODOUR. ITS PARENTS MIGHT REJECT IT
DON'T WORRY GRANDMA! THIS WILL GIVE IT A NATURAL FOREST SCENT!
THE END

illustrated by two Poles living abroad: Grzegorz Rosinski (**Thorgal**, **Hans**) and Zbigniew Kas Kasprzak (who continued **Hans**). Small comics pieces created by young and talented Polish artists were also shown in the pages of **Komiks-Fantastyka**: work by Jerzy Ozga, Slawomir Wroblewski, Slawomir Jezierski, Tomasz Tomaszewski, Marek Wdziekonski and Krzysztof Gawronkiewicz. Today, they are - with the exception of Wroblewski and Wdziekonski, who dropped comics – the most significant comics artists that Poland has produced.

GETTING ORGANIZED

In February 1991 the first comics convention took place in Kielce. It was a very small but significant meeting of about 30 comics creators, meeting each other for the first time. A group of young artists established two creators' organizations: "Contur", based in Lodz (1990) and "Studio Komiks Polski", in Bydgoszcz (1988). "Contur" proposed organising an annual comic convention. From September 1991 until the present this festival has taken place in Lodz. "Studio Komiks Polski" established a new comics magazine called **Awantura** (**The Fight**) (1990-1991). Another new magazine to be started was **Fan**, established in Gdansk (1989-1991).

FRESH TALENTS

Jerzy Ozga debuted in **Komiks-Fantastyka** in 1989. He published a very expressive fantasy comic entitled *Ksiega miecza* (*The book of the sword*). Slawomir Jezierski published his short, funny comic *Wybawiciel* (*The Liberator*) and Slawomir Wroblewski presented *Rossana*, a short comic about a young girl drowning in her bathtub. Marek Wdziekonski published his *A Very Heroic Fantasy,* based on a script by Jerzy Szylak. In 1991 Slawomir Wroblewski established his own comic magazine **Super-Boom!**. It survived until 1993. A very similar magazine was born in Poznan bearing the title **Boom!**, but only one issue was published. Piotr Drzewiecki, another talented comic artist, published a fantasy album entitled **Zemsta rodu** (**Family revenge**) – he more typically produces humorous underground-style comics. Another example of typical punk underground comics is the work of Dariusz "Pala" Palinowski and Krzysztof "Prosiak" Owedyk. Both run their own fanzines: **Zakazany Owoc** (**Forbidden Fruit**), and **Prosiaczek** (**The Piglet**). Owedyk published two very interesting albums: **Osma czara** (**The Eighth Cup**) and **Ratboy**, each more than 100 pages long. Palinowski published **The Adventures of the Kowalski Brothers** in 1996 through a big commercial publishing house.

THE NEW WAVE

After the big boom came a recession in the Polish comic market during 1991/2 – it was overloaded with a large amount of very bad and unprofessional comics (not those mentioned above, of course) with circulations varying from 50,000 to 100,000 copies. Not being robust enough to support such levels, the market was bound to collapse. A few interesting comics managed to be published at that time, though. Jezierski and Szylak produced an adaptation of **Alice in Wonderland**, and Jezierski and Kleczynski created a popular comic serial about a blue rabbit called **Kic Przystojniak** (**Kic the Handsome**). Pawel Pawlak made a very realistic adaptation of **The Two Journeys of Gulliver** (1990), based on Jonathan Swift's famous novel. Przemyslaw Truscinski created a number of very attractive short comics including **The Candidate**, **Expedition to the Moon**, and **Heaven and Hell**. In 1992 a new and attractive magazine dedicated to comics,

called **CDN**, was established - but the first issue was also the last one. Ironically, **CDN** is short for "to be continued" in Polish.

THE INDEPENDENTS

After the comics market had slipped into a deep crisis, artists and critics who had missed the chance to publish via a big publishing house decided to establish their own small magazines. The first one was **AQQ**, which was established in 1993. Since then it has promoted most of the artists mentioned above and also such newcomers as Jacek Celadyn, Aleksander Ogaza, Ola Czubek, Grzegorz Weigt, Tomasz Piorunowski, Cyryl Lechowicz and Krzysztof Ostrowski. Together, these artists have strongly influenced the art of comics in Poland. **AQQ** was the first magazine to publish critical essays, historical articles, reviews, reports from comic festivals and comic exhibitions. Two new comics with strongly marked characters appeared almost one after another in 1994 and 1995. Krzysztof Gawronkiewicz and Dennis Wojda made their debut in the magazine **Kelvin & Celsjusz** (**Calvin & Hobbes**) with their surrealistic story of an unreal fantasy town called Mikropolis. Rafal Skarzycki and Tomek Lesniak presented the first episodes of the humorous *Jez Jerzy* (*Jerry the Hedgehog*), about a crazy hedgehog, in the children's magazine **Swierszczyk**.

In the wake of **AQQ**, the best positioned and most reliable critical magazine in Poland, came other well-edited comic fanzines: **Komiks Forum** (1994), **KKK** (1996), **Krakers** (1996) and **Arena-Komiks** (2000).

TIME FOR COMICS

The most efficient attempt, in the middle of the 1990s, at producing a big, professional comics magazine with a large circulation was **Czas Komiksu** (**Time of Comics**), established in Lodz in 1995. Almost all in full colour (all fanzines mentioned before were black & white), it was founded and financed by a lawyer called Waldemar Jeziorski. He co-operated with several comics artists, inventing projects for longer stories, and then presented them in **Czas Komiksu**. He also paid the artists for their hard work, which was rather unusual at that time (even now most magazines are non-profit making). Jeziorski attracted undiscovered young talents such as Jacek Fras (winner of the Debuts competition at the comic festival in Angoulême in 2001), Andrzej Janicki and Jacek Michalski, who started a cyber-punk/SF/crime serial called

Aurora, and Tomasz Piorunowski and Agnieszka Papis, who together created Poland's first erotic comic **The Minuet**, a story set in the 18th century. But, after 8 issues, Jeziorski had to close down the magazine. **Czas Komiksu** had achieved a circulation of 5,000 copies.

THE BIG STEP

A new phase for comics came into being when the pan-European publishing house Egmont established a division in Poland. Egmont had tried to launch comic albums in the Polish market as early as 1994 (with **Thorgal** and **Tintin**) but had failed to profit. In 1998 Egmont established a brand new comic magazine called **Swiat Komiksu** (**The World of Comics**), with a circulation of 28,000 copies. This turned out to be a successful investment. Over two years Egmont managed to improve their distribution network, then tried to launch comic albums again. **Swiat Komiksu** helped as a medium to promote album series such as **Thorgal**. This was a major hit in Poland, with each album of the **Thorgal** series having a circulation of 20,000 copies. Today, Egmont is the leader in the Polish market with up to 12 new titles appearing every month, including **Slaine**, **Peter Pan**, **Hellboy**, **Sin City**, and **Dylan Dog**. Egmont has also decided to publish and promote comics by local authors, such as **Jez Jerzy** by Lesniak and Skarzycki, **Gail** by Piotr Kowalski and **Breakoff** by Robert Adler and Tobiasz Piatkowski. Egmont has also set about acquiring the rights to some of Poland's most treasured classics, in the form of beautiful new editions including **Kajtek i Koko w Kosmosie** (**Kajtek and Koko In Space**) by Janusz Christa and **Tytus, Romek i A'Tomek** by Henryk Jerzy Chmielewski.

MEPRON, STOJ! CO CHCESZ ZROBIĆ?!
UWAŻAJ, JEGO GENIALNY MÓZG MA PRZERWANE POŁĄCZENIE Z ROZSĄDKIEM.
WRRUM!!
WYSADZIŁEM SEKTORY 417
ZARZĄDCA MA ZA SWOJE, CHCIAŁ ZNISZCZYĆ INNYCH I TO JEDNO Z JEGO NARZĘDZI WYMKNĘŁO MU SIĘ SPOD KONTROLI.
TERAZ SPOWODUJE ŚPIĘCIE W STRATOCYKLONIE, TO DOPIERO BĘDZIE FAJERWERK.
ALEŻ ON ZNISZCZY NAS I SIEBIE!
KHA, KHA! DUSZE SIĘ! POWSTRZYMAJ TEGO SZALONEGO ROBOTA!
JEGO NIC JUŻ NIE POWSTRZYMA. UCIEKAJMY
PIEKŁY RURY Z JAKIMŚ GAZEM.
MUSIMY SAMI SZUKAĆ WYJŚCIA. BIEGNIJMY TAMTYM KORYTARZEM.

POPMAN AND PRODUKT

Tomasz Tomaszewski is one of Poland's finest authors, a creator of intelligent and highly artistic comics. His work has been published in almost every comics magazine in Poland. In 1999 he created **Popman** - a character made of old newspapers, living in a realistic environment. It's a real pleasure to observe the extent of Tomaszewski's imagination and his ability to comment on contemporary times. In 2000 one of Tomaszewski's stories was published in the prestigious French anthology published by L'Association, **Comix 2000**. This huge anthology contained wordless strips by artists from all over the world, contributed in the name of the new millennium. Quite different from Tomaszewski, but no less talented, is Michal Sledzinski. This 23-year-old artist is the inventor of a completely new approach to comics on the Polish scene. Sledzinski took his way of publishing comics from the Americans and adapted it into the Polish market. **Osiedle Swoboda (Liberty Estate)**, his most important comic serial, describes the grey life of Polish suburbia with its sad looking block-housing projects. In 1999 Sledzinski found a publisher willing to invest in **Produkt**, his most successful project. **Produkt** is aimed at teenagers and has established itself as Poland's most popular comics magazine in terms of circulation. The provocative image of **Produkt**, with its use of explicit lyrics and American-style underground comics, keeps gaining it more and more readers with each issue. Many young talents have debuted in its pages, including Filip Myszkowski, Kamil Kochanski, and Maciej Siminski.

TOWARDS A NORMAL MARKET

To sum up the last decade - one has to admit that a lot of the efforts to build a strong comics scene in Poland were wasted. Although a few interesting characters were invented and a handful of well-edited albums were published, no one can tell for sure whether a larger number of comics and albums might have seen daylight if conditions in the home market had been similar to the Western markets. Still, every month a few Polish albums are published. There's a big comic magazine, **Swiat Komiksu**, with a circulation of 28,000 copies, **Produkt**, selling 10,000 copies and growing, and one small magazine, **AQQ** (2,000 copies). Other magazines (except for **Arena-Komiks**) can be classified as fanzines, with circulations reaching 700 copies. The Manga scene is also present in Poland (**Akira**, **Pokemon**, **Dragon Ball**, **Chojin Locke**, etc.) as well as American and European (primarily French) comics. This year, 200 new titles will be published in Poland, including 20-25 Polish albums. Who knows? If everything continues to proceed as at present, Poland might have a chance to reach the standards of the western European comics market in two or three years.

SKLEP NOCNY
SPIT!
TWO BEERS, THAT'S WHAT I WANT...
SKINS
PUNK Not Dead
ŻEBAK APATOW
SIT, BO, SHIT!
HEY! WHAT ARE YA LOOKIN' AT, COCKSUCKA!
LEAVE IT, MAN...
STAY COOL, BEAR. DON'T TOUCH THE SHIT.
FUCK, I COULD...
TELL ME, BADMAN. FROM WHERE THIS SHIT CAME FROM? WHY THE INNOCENT MAN IS AFRAID TO WALK DA STREET AFTER DARK, SOMETIMES KILLED IN DA EYES OF THE SUN. TELL ME...

DREAMS IN BLACK AND WHITE

Dennis Wojda offers a Polish comics' creator's view of the history of comics in his country

THE PROPAGANDA YEARS

During communism in Poland books and newspapers were printed in gigantic quantities – and comics as well. It wasn't unusual for a comics album to have an print run of up to 200,000 copies. But when the free market arrived, publishing comics turned out to be a rather unprofitable business. Most of the big publishers started to show a lack of interest in publishing and promoting comicbooks. The background for this situation was not only low profits but also a growing negative public opinion. For a very long time comics were considered as something negative and intellectually poor and the term "comic" was often used when describing coarseness and simplicity. Reading comic books or – God forbid – making your own comics albums weren't anything you would admit to in public.

These bad connotations were remnants from the communist era, when comics were used as a medium for political propaganda amongst children and youngsters. Those were the glory days of comics such as **Kapitan Zbik (Captain Zbik)**, the adventures of a politically correct police officer, and **Kapitan Kloss (Captain Kloss)**, set in WWII and telling the story of a patriotic Polish soldier who would help the Red Army to free Poland by infiltrating the Nazis. There were, of course, also non-political comic series like **Tytus, Romek i A'Tomek**, a weird story about a strange chimp called Tytus and his friends Romek and A'Tomek. Papcio Chmiel, the author of the **Tytus** series, is still publishing new episodes of this cult classic.

ESCAPING THE MIDDLE AGES

The 90s were in many ways a very bad decade for the Polish comics market. Some people would refer to this period as the "Middle Ages" of the Polish comics scene. There were few new comics appearing, and almost no reprints of classic Polish comics. This suffocating situation led to the emergence of a comics underground movement.

In the beginning the independent comic scene was rather hermetic and yet very much about integration for Poland's young and ambitious comic artists. Some feeble attempts were made to publish foreign albums on a larger scale - for a long time the leader on the local market was the Polish branch of the pan-European publishing house Egmont.

Amongst its biggest successes were - and probably still are - the **Asterix** and **Thorgal** series. Still, no one would publish comics made by local artists. The alternative turned out to be a flourishing market of comics fanzines.

Many zines have appeared during the years and not many have managed to keep their positions. Although most of them start as strictly local zines, some have managed to raise their circulations, add colour to their pages and to cooperate with distributors, thus becoming available in kiosks and bookstores all over the country.

The most important zines are **AQQ** (from Poznan), **Arena Komiks** (from Lodz) and **KKK** (based in Krakow).

AQQ is one of Poland's most comprehensive and well-written zines, run by Witold Tkaczyk since 1992. It is mainly a theoretical magazine, constantly analyzing and deconstructing the ever-changing comics scene in Poland. Still, it's known for presenting work created by the crème of Polish artists. **AQQ** is also the biggest magazine in terms of circulation.

Arena Komiks is the most artistic zine of the bunch. It is run by two talented and highly

acclaimed illustrators; Tomek Tomaszewski (author of the artistic **Popman** series) and Tomek Piorunowski (author of the erotic series **Paula**). **Arena Komiks** is held on a very high aesthetic level and it's a true forum for Poland's most talented and ambitious comics artists.

KKK is the voice of the Krakow Comic Club. This small magazine, placed somewhere

between **AQQ** and **Arena Komiks**, is strongly connected with the Comic and Manga Festival of Krakow, from which this ambitious zine derives. Unfortunately it can only be bought by mail order and in special comic stores.

THE COMICS CONSPIRACY

The driving force of the Polish comic scene has always been the International Comic Festival of Lodz.

It all began in 1991 in Kielce when Poland's first comic festival was organized by a group of comics fanatics. Krzysztof Gawronkiewicz, a comics illustrator, recalls the event: "There was a group of about 30 people, gathered in an old building somewhere in Kielce. People had come from all over the country. We were dressed smartly in suits and ties. It almost felt like a conspiracy of some sort. We would stand in a circle with our comics scattered all over the floor, analyzing and discussing in a very special atmosphere."

In 1992 the festival was moved to Lodz and since then has been organized in the city's Cultural Center. The concept of the festival has changed to an international and more spectacular event, with numerous exhibitions, lectures and academic sessions devoted to the art and history of comics, special guests from abroad etc. Grzegorz Rosinski, co-author of the **Thorgal** series, visits the festival each year to promote his latest albums. His presence at the festival has a great influence on the number of visitors and contestants (about 2,000-3,000 visitors during its three day duration). This year the famous Yugoslavian-born artist Enki Bilal will be a special guest.

Amongst the highlights of the festival is the comic contest with its exhibition and awards. Almost 200 comics novels compete to win the prestigious Grand Prix. Each year sees a great number of contestants from Poland, and from other countries such as the Czech Republic, Belarus, Japan, the UK, and the USA, to name a few. There is also a large comics mart where you can mingle with fanatical collectors, publishers and fans. This is a good opportunity to buy the latest zines and albums and meet with illustrators and scriptwriters.

Even though the festival in Lodz remains the biggest in the country it isn't the only one. In March this year the second Warsaw Comic Festival took place, a more chaotic younger cousin of the Lodz festival that has grown up under the patronage of a Warsaw-based comicstore called "Centrum Komiksu". So finally, the market has managed to synch with the festivals. Publishers use them as an excellent occasion to launch their latest albums. Artists and fans have something to long for, something to keep them hoping during the year. These are the good times.

HERE COMES THE NEW

The comics underground, with its festivals and zines, was for a time the only refuge for creators and lovers of the comics art. Thanks to their engagement, the art form didn't die out in Poland. On the contrary, it became stronger, more mature and, stylistically, more varied. There's no point in mentioning the names of all important artists in the Polish comics scene of today. The list would be endless. Some have made their album debuts, while others still await their chance.

Last year's Lodz festival became the starting point for a new era in Polish comic history - for the first time in many years, big publishing houses, such as the international Egmont and the local Siedmiorog, decided to launch Polish artists! Egmont offered two debuts: the first album in a SF series called **Gail** by Piotr Kowalski, and **Fido & Mel** by Michal Sledzinski, the awkward adventures of a bunch of weird animals. Siedmiorog, a publisher of successful hardcover series from abroad such as Vance and Van Hamme's **XIII**, Canales and Guarnido's **Blacksad** and Lamquet's **Norge**, published the surrealistic art-comic **Mikropolis - Przewodnik turystyczny (Mikropolis - The Tourist Guide)**, the debut album by Krzysztof Gawronkiewicz and Dennis Wojda.

Soon after the festival in Lodz had ended a new publisher called Mandragora appeared on the scene, first presenting **48 stron (48 pages)** by Tobiasz Piatkowski and Robert Adler - one of Poland's most dynamic comic duos. Their second album **Breakoff**, published by Egmont, had its premiere during the 2nd Warsaw Comic Festival this year. Another very much awaited premiere at the Warsaw festival was the debut album **Jez Jerzy nie dla dzieci (Jerry The Hedgehog - Not for**

children) by Rafal Skarzycki and Tomek Lesniak.

All of the "new" authors mentioned above had been known to the public before signing contracts with their publishers. They had gained their popularity through years of hard work publishing and promoting their series in magazines. Piotr Kowalski had been making illustrations for Poland's oldest SF magazine **Nowa Fantastyka** years before creating the **Gail** series. **Mikropolis** and **Jerry the Hedgehog** are a good example of two original Polish comics series with strong recognizable characters. Both series have existed for a long time, being published in a wide range of magazines (and not just comics magazines) and have won the Grand Prix at the Lodz festival.

Probably the most popular contemporary comics character produced in Poland is Jerry - a cool hedgehog who smokes pot and wiggles on his skateboard all day. The fact that Skarzycki, the scriptwriter of the series, has an MA in philosophy, combined with the simple yet strong style of Lesniak's drawing, has added to the commercial success of **Jerry**. Their first album is a compilation of short novels previously printed in **Slizg**, Poland's oldest skateboarding magazine, and more recently in the comics magazine **Produkt**. At the moment two further albums are planned for release - and Lesniak and Skarzycki are among the few authors in Poland who can claim to make a living in the comics business.

Krzysztof Gawronkiewicz and Dennis Wojda are the creators of **Mikropolis**, the story of a strange little town and its peculiar inhabitants. The comic has existed since 1994 and has been published in a long succession of magazines and newspapers, including **Gazeta Wyborcza**, Poland's biggest daily newspaper. The atmosphere of **Mikropolis** is complex, with grotesque dialogue sprinkled with a large dose of black humor. Gawronkiewicz's unique illustrations, inspired by German Expressionist movies, create an atmosphere of unreality. Completely different from **Mikropolis** are the worlds created by Adler and Piatkowski. These two young men are at the moment in the forefront of Poland's comics artists. They represent a very mature and commercial style that is very attractive to a wide audience. Their graphic novels, inspired by cyberpunk, manga and American B-movies, have been popularized in computer game magazines for a long time. **Breakoff**, their second album, is set in a futuristic Warsaw. The plot is very well written, full of violence, shootings, explosions and scantily-dressed dames!

Michal Sledzinski, author of **Fido & Mel**, is also the founder of **Produkt**, Poland's biggest and most aggressive comic magazine. It began in 2001 when Michal, a 21-year-old guy living in Bydgoszcz, decided on making his own comic magazine. Together with his friends he adapted a working method inspired by Kevin Smith's film *Chasing Amy*. The "Product Crew", as they referred to themselves, worked hard, day and night, in a tiny flat in Bydgoszcz, making up stories and drawing novels. And then one day, **Produkt** saw the daylight. The magazine, black and white with a cover in colour and a circulation of 10,000 copies, hit the public like a smack in the face. Its content is very fresh and aggressive, simple and funny stories full of the things that kids like most: sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. The magazine is not primarily aimed at comics fans but rather at young frustrated kids with a need for stories about themselves, about their lives and with their sense of humour. **Produkt** has built itself a strong position in the market and in Poland's comics scene, promoting not only the work of Michal Sledzinski (author of the controversial series *Liberty Estate*) but also that of talented young artists like Myszkowski, Bison, Minkiewicz and Gosieniecki, to name but a few.

Poland's comics scene is very specific. Although it differs a lot from the western markets, it's actually growing. Every month a large number of albums are published. Polish artists finally have a chance to be attractive to local publishers. The media and public opinion are changing their attitudes toward the art of comics. Let's hope that this is the beginning of something bigger! If this is a dream then I don't want to wake up.

THERE ARE NO BARRIERS

CLA$$WAR™

Borderline's Jay Eales in conversation with Cla$$war creators Rob Williams and Trevor Hairsine...

FROM the press release for issue 1: "Modern day America: sedated, a land of authoritarian corporations, corrupt politicians and imposing wealth. Two men are going to change that. One is a jaded ex-CIA operative who has seen first hand the terrible acts committed in the name of freedom. The other is one of the government's own genetically-enhanced soldiers. A 'super' man who has killed for his country, and now questions what he was fighting for. Together they're going to battle for a truth that can't be found in the mainstream. They're going to show ordinary people the real rulers of the 'free' world. But the secret monarchs aren't just going to sit back and let them speak. Cla$$war mixes the high-octane action of the traditional super-heroics with a gritty, political sensibility."

Cla$$war is a 6-issue miniseries, written by journalist Rob Williams and illustrated by Trevor Hairsine, best known for his 2000AD work. Ostensibly a superhero drama, the story owes much to the books of political writer Noam Chomsky and the philosophy of Bill Hicks, according to the author. Published by fledgling British independent comics publisher Com.X, Cla$$war stands a good chance of being the first major break-out title for the company - if they can get to grips with a regular publishing schedule.

Focusing on super-soldier American, and his battle to open the eyes of America to the truth behind the American Dream, Cla$$war has a great deal to recommend it. The production values are extremely high, with rich colours and quality paper stock. Rob Williams' comics debut is self-assured, and Trev Hairsine's art, always a highlight of any issue of 2000AD he appeared in, is among the best of his career to date.

Borderline: Let's begin with the introductions, shall we?

Rob Williams: I grew up in South Wales – the Rhondda valley to be exact. Spent 18 years there. Went to college, got my degree then did a Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism. Graduated from that and I've been working as a journalist ever since - mostly freelance but I spent three years directing and writing corporate videos, which taught me visual storytelling, something that helped my comics writing no end. I've written and sub-edited for more magazines than is healthy, including *GQ*, *Total Film*, *Total Football*, *SFX*, *Dreamwatch* and many more. I'm currently splitting my time between the journalism and the comics writing. And I live in Bristol with my missus.

Trevor Hairsine: I used to work for Comet (with some meat packing on

the side), which, funnily enough, inspired me to do the things I wanted to do.

The quick version [*of how I got into the comics business, is that*] I sent some photocopies in to 2000AD of Marvel characters with my phone number at the top and they gave me some work. Sorry, bit boring!

First thing I ever did was to create *Harmony* with Chris Standley for the Megazine. I still like that character. A forty year old, kick-arse bounty hunter woman. Cool. I like to draw genuinely strong women.

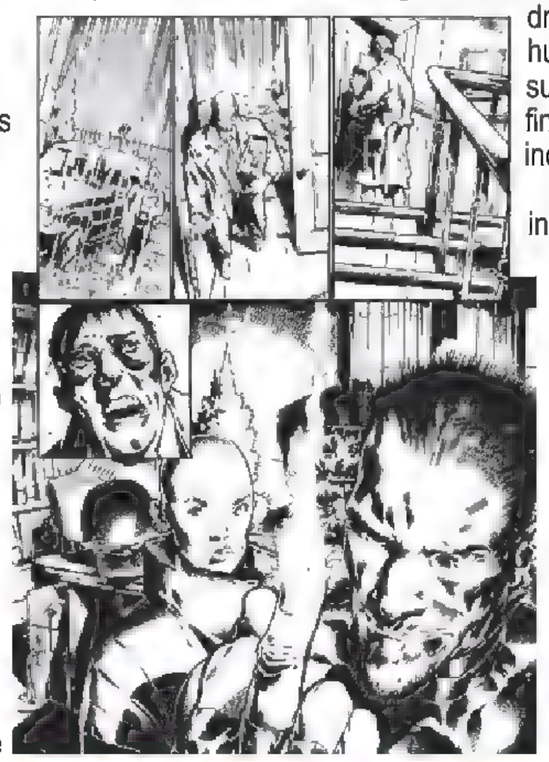
Soon after, Dave Bishop gave me Judge Dredd, Mean Machine and [*Judge*] Death to draw in the same story, *The Three Amigos*. And I've been stuck for something to top that since, really.

Until Cla$$war came along.

BL: Can you give me some idea of the gestation process for Cla$$war, from initial idea through pitching to Com.X and eventual publication, and the hiccups along the way?
RW: The initial idea for Cla$$war came from reading Noam Chomsky's *Class Warfare* around two years ago. I love Chomsky and similar political material and I was trying to come up with a good comics idea, and I thought, why not try combining the two?

At the time I was researching how to go about writing a comics script - looking at Gaiman's script in one of the Sandman trades, reading *Writers on Comic Scriptwriting* and Scott McCloud's Understanding Comics. So, I had the idea for Cla$$war and figured I'd write the first issue and then see if I could convince a friend of mine, who's quite a good artist, if he wanted to draw it. I thought that maybe, if it was good enough, I'd self-publish. Luckily he decided he was too busy to do it, so I was left with the script that was pretty much Cla$$war #1 and I had no outlet for it.

I was happy with how the script turned out so I took it to the Comics 2000 festival at Bristol. No one was interested. I had a chat with the Com.X guys, who were swamped with artists and writers on the day and just seemed exhausted. Anyway, I left the script with them and went home from the convention pretty pissed off after banging my head against a wall for two days with no result. I heard nothing for months and then Eddie Deighton at Com.X rang out of the blue one evening. They said they'd finally read the script, really liked it, and could I come down to London to discuss it. So we were away. That was about a year and three quarters before the publication of issue one.



The Com.X guys wanted Trev Hairsine on it from the start - they thought he'd be perfect, and they were right. Once I'd seen Trev's stuff and we'd talked about it he came onboard and started working on designs etc. The thing is, Trev had been out of comics for a while, so it took him a while to get back into the swing of things. And he hadn't done the American 22 page format before. So that was new for him (and me too, of course) and it took him a bit of time to get in stride.

I carried on writing the rest of the series. Then, of course, Trev had to pencil and ink most of the first three issues before we could publish issue one. That all took time. Then, when we finally had issue one ready to go in November 2001, September 11 happened, and it was decided to postpone the series for a while. As it happened that period was three months. We finally got Cla$$war #1 to the shops at the end of February 2002, around two years after I'd finished the first script.

BL: Trev - you left comics for pastures new in the computer games industry a while back. How did Com.X tempt you back into the fold?
TH: They gave me Cla$$war to read. It's just one of the best scripts I've worked on, containing characters and circumstances I love drawing. It has depth, humour and this wonderfully subversive ethic, which I find irresistible. Totally self indulgent.

I was also hoping to involve myself in the running of Com.X, accepting an in-house position. Russ, Ed and Neil are people of infectious drive and vision and I thought I could contribute to the mix. Unfortunately, drawing comics is an all-consuming pastime, leaving little for anything much else, let alone running a business. And so after a while, when I started falling badly behind with deadlines, I shifted back to freelancing and working from home. Unfortunately for me, I work better like that. Pity. I don't like working by myself. That's the Com.X story in a pot.

BL: Trev Hairsine is leaving the series at the halfway point, after issue 3, to take up a position with CrossGen, after one of their "offers you can't refuse". Would you like to comment on that, and are you in a position yet to tell us who will be filling the breach?
RW: Trev hasn't gone to CrossGen. He decided not to go [*but*] he's still leaving Cla$$war because he's been given a different "offer he can't refuse" by another company. I'd have liked him to have completed the six issue run - it would have given it some continuity - he's a great artist and it's almost as much his baby as it is mine. So it's a shame he's leaving. But, you can't blame the guy for looking after his career. I think, and I know that

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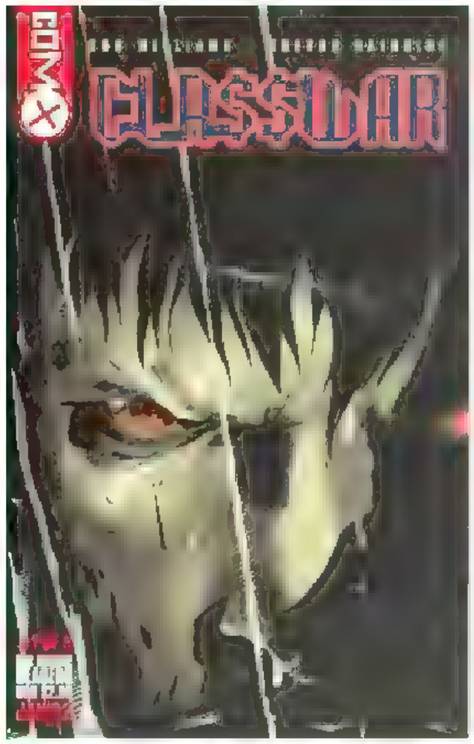


Trev does too, that we've got something special with Cla$$war, and we're both very enthusiastic about it – but he's been given the chance to work on a very high profile book. So, good luck to him. Hopefully we'll work on something else together at some point. We work really well together - I think that shows in what's been produced in Cla$$war.

As for who's taking over from him... I can't say at the moment, as it hasn't been confirmed yet. Sorry.

TH: The reason I left Cla$$war? Money, I'm afraid. I'm not allowed to be self-indulgent anymore. Too old and smelly.

I know Mike Perkins [penciller on CrossGen's Ruse], and I'd nipped in to see him at the CrossGen offices when I was on holiday last year. I was really impressed with the setup and the people – great collection of people – and when they offered me a job I was over the moon. Change of life, company, and good money. [*Without going into specifics, things didn't work out at CrossGen as hoped, leaving Hairsine living with friends, and his furniture in storage.*] I regret not having the opportunity to work with those people in that place.

After the CrossGen job failed, I approached Marvel, who are now trying to figure out what to do with me.

BL: What marks Cla$$war out from similar scenarios (at least on the surface) in titles like Astro City and Rising Stars?
RW: I've read one issue of Rising Stars and that had no similarities to Cla$$war, and I've never read Astro City, so I can't really comment on those two examples. It's been said in some reviews that the Government superhero turning his back on his employers and having a crisis of faith has been done before, most famously in Captain America. But I hope that Cla$$war has enough individuality about it to make it its own story. It's contemporary, and, as issues progress, it tries to reflect the real world as it is at the start of the 21st century, and it's my story, my vision of things. Maybe the central premise has been handled elsewhere before, but on the same basis Watchmen was just another superhero whodunnit (with characters ripped off from the old Charlton comics, at that), The Authority was a riff on the JLA, every other super-team has been derivative of the Fantastic Four. There's not that many truly original ideas out there. As a writer you've got a commitment to try to come up with something new, but a well written comic also comes from good characters, good visuals, a good plot and good dialogue, and Cla$$war's got all those things.

BL: Why comics, and not a political novel? What's the attraction of the medium for you?
RW: I've always loved comics, they've just always been there for me. I've been reading them since I was a kid, whether it was Commando, Roy of the Rovers, Whizzer & Chips, The Avengers or Batman. As I got older that never went away. So, it's only natural that, when I decided I wanted to write these stories, I should want to do them in comics form. It's doing what I loved when I was a kid.

But I also think it's such a bloody great, vibrant, accessible storytelling medium. People are able to be much more creative with it than with TV or films, at the moment. There's less constraints due to the underground nature of the comic scene. You can tell any story, regardless of budget. And there's a purity of vision about it - look at the difference between Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's From Hell and the movie version. No-one was telling them, you have to be more commercial, make it more palatable to a Midwestern American audience. All these things are attractions.

TH: Oh boy. I just love the telling of stories in a visual format. Film and Comics. Comics being the most direct, uncomplicated and, in particular, uncompromised medium. It's challenging and all consuming for me and I have found, although I've tried, I just can't stop.

BL: Any plans to quit the day job, yet, Rob?
RW: Not quite yet. I'm pretty much splitting my time equally between the comics and the journalism at the moment. It's nice, in a way, to have the option there of doing a bit of both, if I feel like it. Although, I must admit, I'd like to get to the point where I'm creatively writing at least 90% of the time. It's what I love doing. And even though I've got ambitions to write for other mediums, it's comics that really fire my enthusiasm at the moment.

BL: Trev - what's Rob Williams like to work with?
TH: The man is a first class writer of comics. He's great to work with and I want to do so again at the earliest available opportunity. He writes with depth and humour and the material he comes out with I just want to arrange and draw. Comics publishers should take note.

BL: Rob - what can you tell us about your upcoming new series in 2000AD with Boo Cook, Asylum?
RW: I always feel that 2000AD works best when it's a mix of social satire and lots of action, so that's what I've tried to do with *Asylum*. Basically, it's a riff on the current asylum furore and a poke at the hateful *Daily Mail* readership mentality. It's the future (obviously, it's 2000AD) and aliens are trying to gain asylum to earth - they've been given their own island to live on, but first they have to go through a holding station that orbits the Earth, in order to be processed. And there's also a group of alien/human hybrids who are charged with hunting down runaway aliens. Everything works fine until some nutter decides to wipe out the aliens because they want to keep the earth clean and pure - then it all kicks off. Even though it's got a lot of action it's

also got that really twisted sense of humour about it that you associate with 2000AD. And Boo Cook's art is great - I've seen the first two issues, at time of writing, and he's loving the whole freaky, alien side of the story. There's a real energy about his stuff. It's his first full series for 2000AD and mine, too, so hopefully it'll come across as fresh.

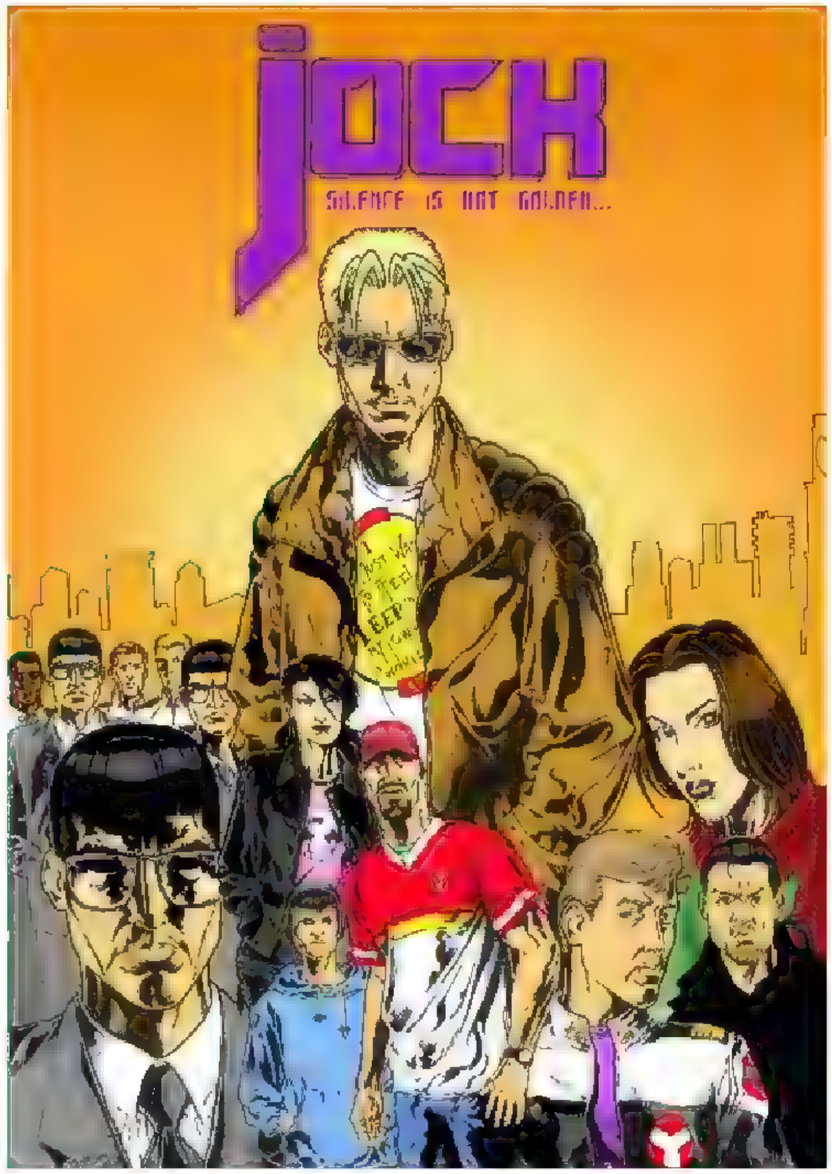
I'm also just starting another series for 2000AD with Pete Doherty called *Breathing Space*, which is totally different. It's a whodunnit set on the moon. I felt like, after *Asylum*, I'd done the "action pic" bit and wanted a change, so this should be a lot more low key, character driven and atmospheric. It's nice to try a different style.

Cla$$war issue 2 reached UK shops in the week commencing 12th May 2002 - future issues will (hopefully!) appear bimonthly, with 32 full colour pages, priced at US$2.99

COM.X has achieved a lot for a new company in the last two years - from helping to spearhead recent successes in getting comics out of the direct market ghetto and into book shops and other venues, to an alliance with Marvel Comics to produce Com.X titles based on four Marvel properties (including two with the 'X' brand, which almost qualifies as a licence to print money), to interest from the movie industry, but with very little in the way of actual product.

After Summer 2000's launch title, Issue Zero, Com.X has released only 3 issues of Bazooka Jules, 3 of Puncture, a 2-part Razorjack serial and the first 2 instalments of Cla$$war. By no means a perfectly oiled corporate machine, Com.X is learning from the mistakes of the past and putting its house in order, with a slate of new titles close to release that look seriously tasty, and redoubled efforts to get Puncture and Bazooka Jules back to a regular schedule.

More information about Com.X can be found at their website: *www.comxcomics.com*, although the three man team of Deighton, Uttley and Googe at the heart of the company don't update the site as often as they might like.



THE JOCK RETURNS?

THE early '90s saw a boom in UK-based small press comics, self-published with whatever means were affordable. Former lettercol regular Rol Hirst employed his love of music, loathing of anodyne multimedia corporations and experiences within the radio industry to create a series called The Jock, set in a near future where a corporation called Yourent has seized control of society by using specially formulated muzak that pacified the population. A small band of rebels break their conditioning and recall the passionate days seemingly gone forever. They broadcast pirate radio shows from a secret underground bunker that holds as much reclaimed, rediscovered and restored vintage music, books, posters and pop culture memorabilia as possible, and this band is led by The Jock, a former star DJ called Jay.

Hirst had a number of artists lined up to illustrate the series, but Nigel Lowrey, the artist tagged to produce the backup strip, assumed the role of regular series artist. Produced on an almost monthly basis, the title became a cult favourite with many high profile fans, and its regularity, interesting characters, intriguing premise and intelligent writing resulted in one of the most interesting comics in its genre. Lowrey remained the regular artist throughout, although he was occasionally bolstered by others including current 2000AD artist Adrian Bamforth. Then, just when Hirst had introduced all his characters and concepts and placed them in position for the big fireworks... it all ended with #27. They remained good friends and every so often they would talk about resurrecting the series; finally, they agreed to collaborate again, but with a difference.

While proud of The Jock as an achievement, they were unhappy with the quality of their work on the series. Hirst now has a better idea of the characters and where things were heading and Lowrey, positively mortified with the quality of his work for much of the original series, believes the current work to be of his highest standard.

Also, as they have explored other writing and drawing venues and have developed as people along the way, rather than continuing the old series and creating a huge disparity between the old and new material they have decided to start from the beginning again. Hirst has restructured the plots, removed old themes and concepts that have since been touched upon in things like The Invisibles, Preacher and *The Matrix*, while Lowrey has reinvigorated the characters and his own style.

However, this new Ultimate Jock is probably never going to appear as a comicbook again. Hirst has been talking to Borderline editorial about developing the project in PDF format, as well as ways of getting it up on websites. Hirst said, "Nigel and I aren't looking to make money out of an online comic, we're putting it on the web for people to read mainly so I don't have to get involved with the costs of photocopying and all that. Our main goal is to submit the book to publishers... yeah, the old dream... but the web thing is not a serious publishing venture like Borderline."

What is good about this is that more people are thinking of the Internet as a tool for progression rather than the be-all and end-all of the future of publishing. Whether The Jock circa 2002 will gain the same cult following it had in the 1990s is unknown, but because of the scope of the Internet it is fairly certain that it will have more readers.

SMALL, BUT PERFECTLY FORMED

Selina Lock interviews herself about The Girly Comic - a comic for girls (and boys)...

WHO are you, how did you get into comics and do you always talk to yourself?

I'm Selina Lock, editor/publisher of The Girly Comic. I'm a relatively recent convert to comics, having been introduced to the medium by my partner (Jay Eales) and by attending events such as the UK Comics Festivals in Bristol. I don't usually go around talking to myself but after spending a week putting together the draft of The Girly Comic my creative energies are at somewhat of a low ebb and interviewing myself seemed the easiest way to write this article!

How did The Girly Comic come about?

It all started on the journey home from Comics 2001, when Jay and I realised that we wouldn't have anything to sell at the Comics 2002 festival. For the last two years we'd been promoting Jay's charity Doctor Who books and helping out on the Violent! small press stall. I rashly decided to step into the breach and do my own comic! My thinking was this: I had been complaining that there seemed to be a lack of comics that appealed to me, and felt that there had seemed to be quite a few comics widows at Comics 2001 that I might be able to entice into buying a comic while their partners were perusing Violent! The irony of selling something called The Girly Comic alongside Violent! wasn't lost on me!

Why call it The Girly Comic when most comic fans are male?

I had been chastised by several male friends for calling the likes of Strangers in Paradise and Scary Godmother *girly comics*. So I thought it would be fun to have something that was *overtly* a girly comic. "Girly" in this sense means that I am aiming it to be a little more woman-friendly than some mainstream comics are, though hopefully that won't restrict the audience to just women. I thought it should have a mix of stories, just like I dimly remember reading in Bunty and Mandy as a kid.

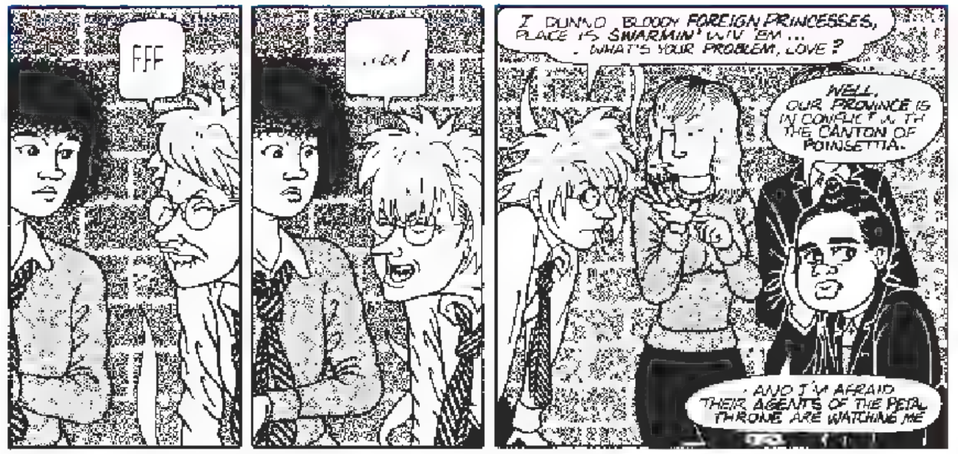
Do you feel you managed to get a mix of stories into the comic that appeal to women?

I think I've managed to find a good range of stories, which means it should appeal to a wide range of people... as long as those people aren't adverse to anthology comics. Highlights include a wonderful cover by Simon Fraser (2000AD), a new Surreal School Story from Terry Wiley (Sleaze Castle/Petra Etcetera), a strip from Borderline's own Jay Eales and illustrated by Steve Ince (Juniper Crescent), plus an autobiographical strip from Lee Kennedy (Inner-City Pagan) that I think many women will sympathise with. Issue 1 also contains quite a few creators that are new to the comics medium and some stories by members of the thriving Liverpool small press scene.

Producing something called The Girly Comic, which is aimed at women, you must be a feminist, right?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines feminism as "advocacy of the rights of women (based on the theory of equality of the sexes)". So I suppose I'm a feminist in the sense that I believe in equal rights. In relation to comics I think there is inequality in the amount of women represented in comics, both as creators and characters. This is why communities such as Sequential Tart and Friends of Lulu have sprung up. However, The Girly Comic is meant first and foremost as entertainment, albeit one aimed at attracting women readers and presenting interesting women characters. Hopefully, readers of the first issue will tell me whether I've succeeded in that editorial aim!

When I first decided to do The Girly Comic I was thinking that maybe it should be a comic for women


FFF
...ex!
I DUNNO, BLOODY FOREIGN PRINCESSES, PLACE IS SWARMIN' WIV 'EM... WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM, LOVE?
WELL, OUR PROVINCE IS IN CONFLICT WITH THE CANTON OF POINSETTIA.
AND I'M AFRAID THEIR AGENTS OF THE PETAL THRONE ARE WATCHING ME

by women, but the more I thought about it the more I realised that a lot of the comics I enjoyed were by men so - why should I assume that women are more likely to write strips that would appeal to women? Most important was whether the submissions were interesting stories with good characterisation. I would still like to do an all-women creators issue sometime in the future as I think it would be an interesting experiment, and the more involved I have become with small press the more women creators I have discovered who I would love to have involved in an issue of the comic.

During the period when I was considering going down the all-women route I read From Girls to Grrrlz, a history of female comics from teens to zines by Trina Robbins. This made me aware of the groundbreaking women's liberation comics from the 70's such as It Ain't Me, Babe, Tits'n'Clits and Wimmen's Comix, and I concluded that I shouldn't even attempt to follow in the footsteps of these giants. I realised that even though the fight continues for more even representation of women and other minorities in comics, we do not face the same challenges that were once faced by female creators. I'm pretty confident that all of you reading this can name at least a handful of female comics writers, artists and editors.

Now we know a little bit about The Girly Comic and the editorial philosophy behind it, how can we get hold of it?

It will be launching at the Comics 2002 festival in Bristol, UK, June 1-2, so anyone going to that can pick it up there. It will also be available by mail order from the website *www.factorfictionpress.co.uk*, either by UK sterling cheque, or by PayPal for overseas buyers. Otherwise, people interested in buying or submitting to future issues can contact me at: *selina.lock@ntlworld.com*

ISSUES

Carol Close – she takes delight in spite...

FRONT

BACK

THIS has been a good couple of months for the comics industry in a touchy-feely, group hug kind of a way. Top Shelf, the publishers of **From Hell** and **Box Office Poison**, stared into the abyss of financial ruin before the good folk over at the Warren Ellis Forum flexed their financial muscles and saved them from a plot in the comic company graveyard alongside First, Eclipse and the rest. Meanwhile, British-based artist Matt "D'Israeli" Brooker took a whole day out of his professional schedule to journey to a school in Doncaster to teach a bunch of jammy-faced kids how to draw comics. Bless.

While both of these incidents fill even my flinty heart with a warm glow of pure unadulterated joy, let's face it, you don't read this column to be told how neat everything is. And although you might kvetch and bitch and moan and whine about the scabrous stuff I write here, you can't get enough of it. Relax, you know it, I know it, it's okay. So, this month I thought I'd talk about the things that really piss me off about the comics industry and the fandom that surrounds it – think of it as my funny-book Room 101, if you like…

SMELLIES

Or, put another way, the gloriously misshapen individuals who stink up Forbidden Planet in their B.O.-saturated "Jay And Silent Bob Strike Back" t-shirts, hate and fear anything that isn't published by Marvel, DC or Image, and frequently stomp all over my £200 Bruno Gigli high-heels without issuing a word of apology. These are the kind of twunts that vote for the **Star Wars** trilogy one, two and three whenever one of those Hollywood-fixated movie rags holds a Greatest Film Ever Made poll. They are also the kind of scum who write to the letters page of **X-Force** and squeal like mortally wounded baby seals about what a terrible mess Milligan and Allred have made of their "favourite book". (And, actually, since we're on the subject, comics are not "books". A book is something that takes several hours to read (longer if you're American), months to write, and might be discussed in the *New Yorker* or the *London Review Of Books*. Most comics, on the other hand, take five minutes to read, a couple of days to write and invariably get reviewed by some illiterate former fratboy in *Wizard*. Can you see the difference?) In fact, the only thing worse than comics fans like the ones discussed above are those that actually think their hobby makes them in some way cool or edgy. Sorry, but the terms "cool" and "comics fans" are as mutually exclusive as "charismatic" and "Jamie Oliver" or "alive" and "the Queen Mother". Face it, "cool" kids, you're as socially inadequate and sexually inexperienced as the "smellies" - you just have better trainers than they do.

SCRIPTBOOKS

Um, what's the point, exactly? Comics are a visual medium - or are at least supposed to be. And isn't this just another way of fleecing the crap out of comic fans already paying well over the odds for their regular monthly pamphlets and graphic novels? Film and theatre script books are perfectly acceptable because they print the words of truly great writers who genuinely enrich our culture, such as Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Robert Towne (*Chinatown*) and Paul Schrader (*Taxi Driver*). The inane droolings of comics hacks (Panel 1: Thor hits Hulk with hammer. Hulk says "Hulk smash long-haired gay boy, grrrr.") just don't seem the same somehow.

SPECULATORS AND "SLABBERS"

Okay, here's the deal. If you have ever spent money on a slabbed comic or worked for a company that slabs comics, you are a soulless jackal for whom death by stoning is far and away too good. You don't deserve to earn enough money to buy comics. In fact, you don't deserve to earn enough money to buy food and shelter. Just kill yourself. Go ahead, no-one's going to mourn you, you fuck.

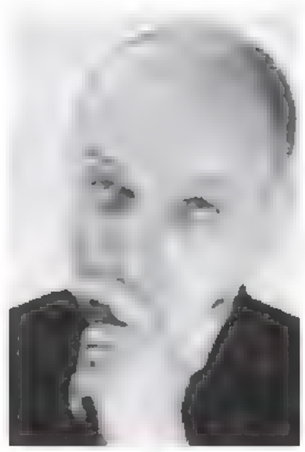
UGLY COLUMNISTS

You will never see my picture on this page. Ever. Why? Firstly, because what I look like is none of your damn' business and, secondly, because the next time I'm in a comic shop, at a mart or convention, I don't want to be bothered by some cockroach-faced 15-year-old whining about how horrid I am. Unfortunately, many of my fellow columnists (some of them in **Borderline**, I hasten to add) seem to think that writing about comics gives them some kind of *carte blanche* to inflict their hideously twisted features on us. And, whether they want to admit it or not, they're all clock-stoppingly, milk-curdlingly UGGGGLLEEEE*. Just check out the menagerie of mingers over at silverbulletcomicbooks.com if you don't believe me. Don't eat anything too rich before logging on, though.

NEW MARVEL

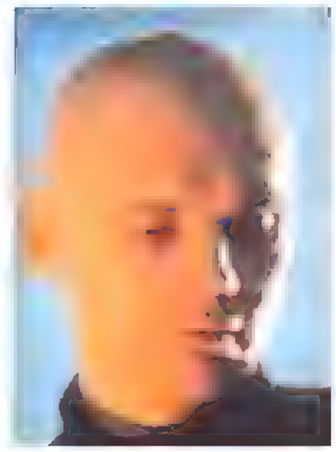
Joe Quesada and Bill Jemas have made Marvel profitable again and they now have three or four comics on their schedules that don't actually suck like a Dyson on maximum power. But what a terrible price we've had to pay for this financial and creative turnaround in the company's fortunes. You see, the thing is, Bill and Joe now have a taste for the spotlight and there's no way even a gang of grumpy Asgardian trolls could drag them away from it. And so we have to bear the two of them cluttering up the Net with their asinine attempts at hype, summed up by the recent "furore" over Peter David and his largely impenetrable **Captain Marvel** series. Come back Bob Harras, all is forgiven? Not quite, but while Harras clearly didn't know his arse from a hole in the ground at least he knew when to shut the hell up. Unlike me.

*Except ex-Tharg David Bishop, who looks like Billy Corgan from Smashing Pumpkins and is therefore totally yummy.



TOTALLY YUMMY? YOU DECIDE..

Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins (left) and Davey-Boy Bishop, once of 2000AD (right). One is a famous rock musician, very rich and critically-acclaimed, the other writes Doctor Who novels...



WHAT IS MANGA?

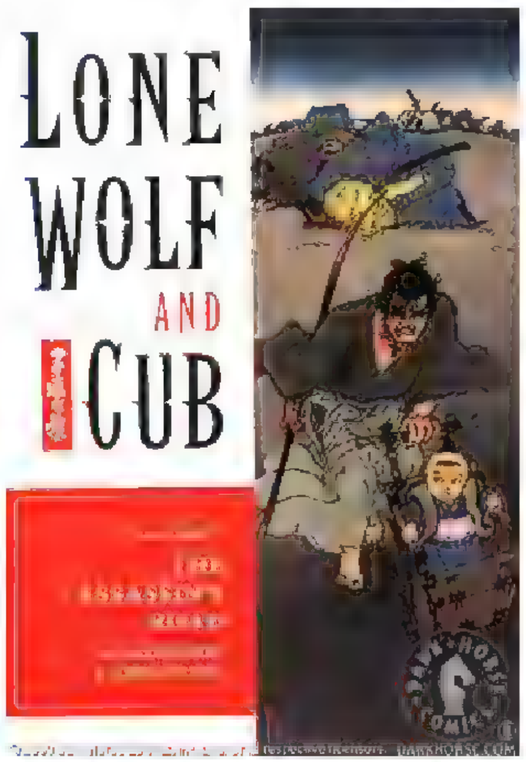
Kevin Hill looks at manga...

Who To Blame?

OKAY, so far the basics of "native" manga have been covered - to an extent, at least - and some series highlighted, but who are the culprits responsible for releasing translated manga in the West?

Strangely, neither DC nor Marvel is currently dallying with translating Japanese comics, and neither is Image. So that's the Big Three struck out.

Dark Horse, however, is a different story. For some years now it has been releasing a line of translated comics alongside its regular US-created series. Recently it has expanded its line to include such classics as **Lone Wolf & Cub** and **Astro Boy**. It has also kept strong ties with the Japanese publisher Kodansha, and along with Studio Proteus has brought forth such series as **Ghost In The Shell**, **Appleseed**, **Oh My Goddess** and **Gunsmith Cats**. Presently its line-up consists of modern-style samurai series **Blade Of The Immortal**, Kenichi "**Gunsmith Cats**" Sonoda's sci-fi **Cannon God Exxaxion**, the aforementioned classics **Lone Wolf & Cub** and **Astro Boy**, plus the manga anthology **Super Manga Blast**. This anthology is perhaps the best way of accessing Dark Horse's manga, being made up of various series for various age groups – although placing a young children's story like **What's Michael?** alongside the more adult **3x3 Eyes** and **Seraphic Feather** may puzzle many as to the point of the anthology.



While Dark Horse has associated itself with Kodansha, Viz Communications – the United States' most prolific publisher of translated Japanese comics – is a wholly owned subsidiary of one of Japan's largest publishers, Shogakukan. This relationship has netted Viz such series as the martial arts comedy **Ranma 1/2** and one of last month's highlights, **Sanctuary**. Viz has not just stuck with releasing Shogakukan's comics, but instead has focused on making the best – and the largest variety – of manga available to the West, and so has plundered series from a variety of Japanese publishers such as Tokuma Shoten (**Bio-Booster Armor Guyver**), Shueisha (**Dragon Ball Z**) and even Dark Horse's primary ally Kodansha (**Vagabond**). Unlike many of the other publishers, Viz has a diverse range of comics available, also providing two anthologies; one similar in manner to Dark Horse's – but without the lop-sided choice of series – and one for mature readers. These anthologies, **Animerica Extra** and **Pulp**, provide the perfect entry levels for people wanting to experience manga in that both provide a variety, with **Animerica Extra**'s mix of boys' and girls' action and romance comics playing off against **Pulp**'s more mature views.

As a relatively recent experiment, and thanks to the wishes of the creators and original publishers of the work, Viz released **Neon Genesis Evangelion** and the two **Dragon Ball** series in their original right-to-left format. While this was an unusual move, it didn't prevent all three series from selling well and has resulted in more series appearing "unflipped". Viz has also experimented more in its choice of series, making available the underground element of Japanese comics plus some other more unusual releases. These have mostly been made available from within **Pulp** magazine, or via a Pulp imprint that has so far released the curious graphic novel **No.5**.

For its sins, Viz is also responsible for the release of the **Pokemon** comic series, along with the aforementioned **Dragon Ball** series and the more recent **Zoids** and **Medabot** series. All of these are aimed at the *Toonami*-watching kids, and have successfully hit their target.

Pretenders to the Crown

The past few years have seen a manga boom reminiscent of, but much unlike, the anime boom of the early-mid '90s. Rather than a flood of material, there has been a gradual increase in the number of Japanese comics seeing translation, and with this has come the rise of a few companies out to take some of that market share from Viz.

Acting as the publishing side of Central Park Media - a company responsible for many anime releases - CPM Manga focused on adaptations of the parent company's releases. A change in tack brought about the release of various monthly comics, such as Kia Asamiya's **Dark Angel** and **Nadesico** series (see **Borderline** #3-4 for Asamiya coverage), plus the fun supernatural action comic **Geobreeders**, fantasy comedy series and animated cartoon **Slayers**, and the comic book version of the popular Japanese role-playing game **Record Of Lodoss War**.

The most recent addition to the manga publishing ranks is the Comicsone Corporation. Primarily an internet based publisher, it has taken to releasing inexpensive collected volumes of work rather than following the usual route of monthly comics publication. Featuring books from Kazuo "**Lone Wolf & Cub**" Koike and Ryoichi "**Sanctuary**" Ikegami - also co-creators of **Crying Freeman** - plus the occasionally disturbing horror manga by **Uzumaki** creator Junji Ito, Comicsone does have a wide

variety of stories on offer.

Leading the challenge to the crown Viz rightly wears is Tokyopop, formed in the mid-to-late '90s as Mixx Entertainment, and initially releasing a manga anthology which intermixed articles on Japanese cultural elements such as video-gaming and animation. The initial choices of content for **Mixx Magazine** were intriguing, featuring the sci-fi horror **Parasyte** – think John Carpenter's *The Thing* and you won't go far wrong; **Mobile Suit Gundam: Blue Destiny**, a precursor to the popular **Gundam Wing** stories; Studio Clamp's **Magic Knight Rayearth** (see the all-Clamp column in **Borderline** #5); **Ice Blade**, a spy thriller; and the basketball manga **Harlem Beat**. A bit of variety, but one that - through Tokyopop's decision to release collected volumes of *all* its series – has proved successful, with **Harlem Beat** currently collected into nine books and **Parasyte** on its twelfth volume.

Since then Tokyopop has added to its ranks with a girls' anthology, **Smile**, which contains the incredibly readable **Peach Girl** (see **Borderline** #6 for details), plus monthly comics releases of works such as **Cardcaptor Sakura** and **Gundam Wing**. Tokyopop has also started translating and releasing Korean comics such as the mythical fantasy **Ragnarok** and the supernatural action series **Island**, in an unusual move for what is principally a publisher of Japanese comics, though this not the first time other Asian countries' comics have been so released.

The past couple of months have seen a change in the way Tokyopop is releasing its comics. With the release of its "100% Authentic Manga" line, Tokyopop is releasing 13 series; each volume is priced just under 10 dollars and remains in the original right-to-left format of the Japanese, with its sound effects still intact – not retouched as with most translated series. It's a bold move, but one that appears to be having some success. Those hooked on any of Tokyopop's other series, such as **Gundam**, **Magic Knight Rayearth**, or **Peach Girl**, will find something else suited to their tastes in these new releases.

Rather than over-subscribing to one genre, or focusing purely on boys' comics, the release list contains stories of romance, action, sci-fi, and even cars.

Something for everyone? Maybe. More than likely. But one thing is for sure, there isn't a better time to start fishing around for a comic to suit you. To reiterate the point of this column, they're comics. Japanese or not, they're still comics, and there's just as much chance that one of the releases by these companies will suit you as there is that something from the rest of your *Previews* catalogue's comics section will interest you. And with more and more series seeing the light of day in translated form, that chance is possibly increasing.

TRANSATLANTIC MEDITATIONS

Arnold T. Blumberg's musings from America...
This month – Spider-Man's a nice guy!

THERE'S a point in *Ghostbusters* when Bill Murray's character, Dr. Peter Venkman, watches in horror as a towering demon in the guise of the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man crushes a church beneath his fluffy foot. Venkman's response is as memorable as it is funny:

"Nobody steps on a church in my town!"

It's the kind of macho, New York-bred bravado that characterizes the city as being quintessentially American and supremely "Noo Yawk" - a fierce pride in place and people that transcends all other affiliations. And in another context, you can imagine Spider-Man saying exactly the same thing as Venkman because, beneath the red and blue tights, bizarre powers and high-tech web shooters, he is, after all, just an average New Yorker. Peter Parker is your basic all-American guy, and we love him for it.

This notion was crystallized by Marvel and writer J. Michael Straczynski following the events of September 11 and the release of Marvel's more or less "official statement" on the terrorist attacks, **Amazing Spider-Man #36**. No-one thought it the least bit surprising that Spider-Man would be the Marvel Universe's "spokesperson" on the tragedy, for who better to articulate the feelings of a city and a nation than a born-and-bred New Yorker with a heart of gold? Heck, after all those years being fed by Aunt May, good ol' Pete practically bleeds apple pie.

It also makes him one of the most perfect surrogate figures in superhero comics, enabling readers to witness the most outlandish cosmic conflagrations through the eyes of a down-to-Earth Joe who, admittedly, can leap around like a

maniac and adhere to almost any surface. Granted this fellow isn't exactly John Q. Public, but in his heart he's as normal and American as any other guy on the street over here, and that's why he's endured as Marvel's flagship hero for forty years.

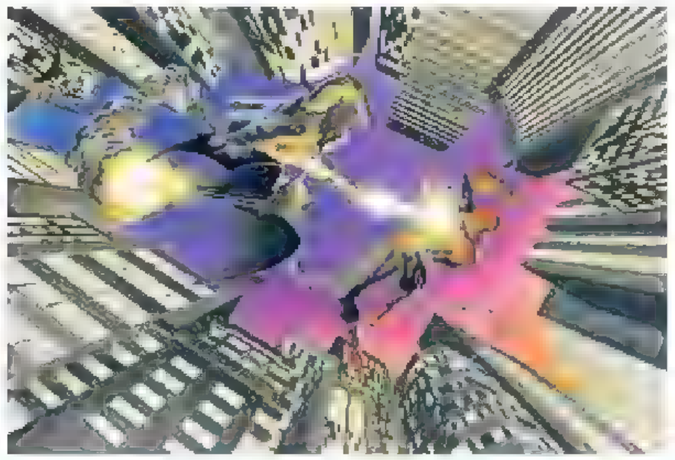
As many others have observed, it's extremely difficult to write for a character like Superman. This is a guy, either pre- or post-*Crisis*, who really has little need to worry about almost anything. He's nigh invulnerable, capable of flying at breakneck speeds and of bending steel in his bare hands, and to top it all off he married the girl of his dreams and is loved by trillions around the cosmos. Who can identify with that?

Now take Peter Parker - the kid was always an outcast, unpopular and too bookish for his classmates. Even after acquiring powers that should have made his life one big dream come true, he is hated by the very people he protects, reviled by the media, regularly pummeled by criminals who seem to have no agenda other than to ruin his day and he can't keep his personal life and career in any kind of order either. To top it all off, the love of his life died at his own hand while he was trying to save her and the "next best thing" that he later married has now run off to "find herself," leaving him alone once again. Who can't identify with that?

While the film version of the wall-crawler (just coming off its record-breaking opening weekend as I write this) introduces the notion that web fluid is not a scientific discovery of Parker's, but rather another result of the bite from a genetically altered spider, we know the truth: it's pathos that surges through Spider-Man's veins. And as creepy as he seems to that trademark Ditko-esque "Man on the Street" (a "vox pops" storytelling device that happily makes an appearance in the film as well), he is perhaps the most human superhero of all. The movie does in fact embrace those qualities of the character that make him so beloved by Spider-fans on this side of the pond, right down to preserving the classic red, white and blue colors of the wall-crawler's superhero union suit. OK, so there's black in there too, but go with me on this one.

We all know about the World Trade Center sequence shot for the advance trailer, originally planned for inclusion in the film proper and then pulled following the events of September 11. But an even more blatant and yet wholly appropriate alteration to the feature can be seen toward the end, when the Green Goblin - at the time busying himself with arranging the murder of several dozen men, women and children - is attacked and berated for his vicious behavior. No, it's not Spidey this time, but a crowd of angered New Yorkers on the Queensboro Bridge hurling objects and verbal scorn at the glider-borne Goblin. This is one tough city.

There are those who feel that the newfound post-September 11 patriotism embraced by so many Americans borders on a disturbing jingoism, a sort of socially sanctioned racist outlook that has no place in the Land of the Free. Fair enough. But if there's one aspect of this phenomenon that was not inspired by hatred but by love for one's fellow citizens, city and country, it was the reaction of New Yorkers to the horrific scarring of their hometown. As a cohesive unit, these people pulled together to present a message to the rest of the world, the same message heard in the *Spider-Man* movie's bridge scene - you mess with one New Yorker, you mess with us all. What better medium than Spider-Man's silver screen debut to underline that proud statement?



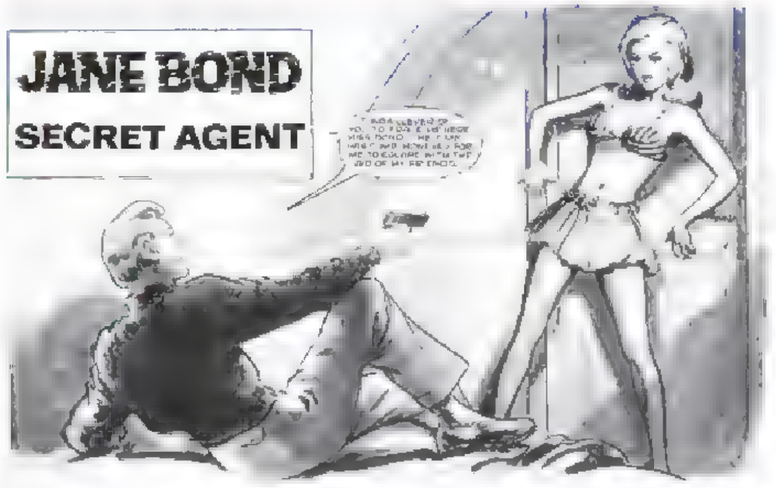
You'll have to trust me on this one - I'm usually not one to wave our flag indiscriminately. In the weeks following September 11, I was one of only three people in the entire nation who did not apparently rush to the nearest convenience store and buy every car-mountable American flag on the shelves... although I did put a decal in the back window of my gas-guzzling all-American SUV - manufactured in Japan - because I thought I might be shot on sight if I didn't. And I'm not, nor have I ever claimed to be, a New Yorker. I'm a Baltimorean, and proud of it.

But I am, for good or ill, a Spider-Man fan from way back, and I think it's a pleasant notion that as he gains a wider audience through the movie and its inevitable sequels, he might serve as a welcome ambassador for the ideals some US citizens still believe in - an aspiration to a higher morality, a dedication to the principles of justice, (in theory if not always in practice), and a love of one's country and hometown. True, Spidey never seemed to manage his media image too well in his *own* universe, but there's no J. Jonah Jameson in this world to drag him through the muck, so he should do just fine. Ultimately, Our Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man is just a regular American guy... organic webbing notwithstanding.

Maybe I should hang a little stuffed Spider-Man figure from my car antenna...

MILESTONES

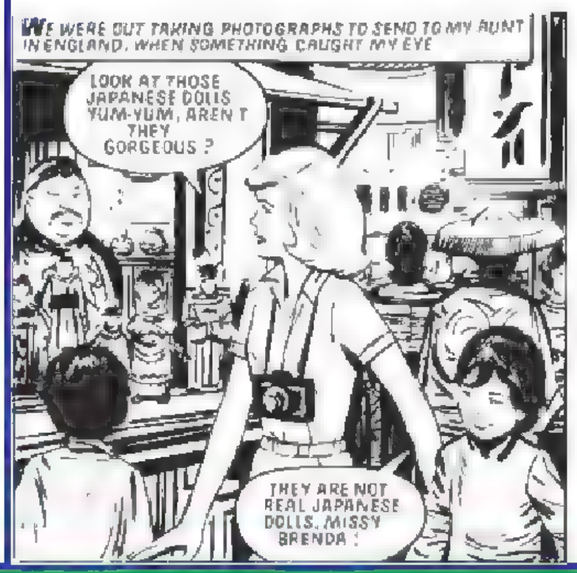
Mike Kidson explores key moments in the history of comicbooks



SOME milestones are big, prominent and point the way clearly; others are small and obscure, though no less indicative. This month's topic may be small and insignificant in itself, but it created a significant breakthrough for British comics in a market which has rarely been studied and remains too little known, and it heralded a significant change in the style and content of British comics for girls.

Translation and reprinting of comics across international borders has been taking place, it seems, for as long as comics themselves may have existed. Yet, perhaps because so many studies of comics have in the past been nationally oriented, the extent and details of such international traffic are still being revealed. Two things are clear: that, from the reproduction of Rodolphe Töpffer's work in Germany, Italy, Denmark, The Netherlands, Britain and America to the worldwide popularity of **Tintin** and at all points in between, the extent has been enormous; and that it has clearly proved highly profitable for many a publisher.

But as far as I know, until the 1960s international distribution of popular comics was a lucrative afterthought, not something deliberately planned from the outset of a comic's publication. And here is where our little milestone emerges. In 1967 the newly aggregated British publishing corporation IPC launched **Tina**, a new comic for girls that was specifically intended to break IPC into the international market with a set of stories placing heroines in foreign locations. Why a girls' comic was chosen for the project is not certain, but a reasonable guess may be hazarded; whereas British boys' comics tended to feature adult characters engaged in more or less fantastic adventures, the titles for girls generally told stories of girl heroines in present day school, domestic and workplace settings which were somewhat more realistic and perhaps internationally recognisable.


WE WERE OUT TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS TO SEND TO MY AUNT IN ENGLAND. WHEN SOMETHING CAUGHT MY EYE
LOOK AT THOSE JAPANESE DOLLS YUM-YUM, AREN'T THEY GORGEOUS ?
THEY ARE NOT REAL JAPANESE DOLLS, MISSY BRENDA !

In fact, since their emergence during the 1950s girls' comics had often contained stories in international settings - but there had been a distinctly imperialist flavour to earlier examples, with plucky British heroines stoutly aiding helpless foreigners. **Tina** was clearly meant to be rather less patronising than that, although in practice it often failed dismally. For instance, in *My Chum Yum-Yum* the narrator, an English girl living in Hong Kong, may well have acted as the sidekick to a resourceful Chinese girl, but for all her resourcefulness Yum-Yum was still an embarrassingly stereotypical portrayal of a foreigner, speaking in pidgin English and being faithful to her white friend. But strips like the beautifully drawn *Westward The Wagons*, in which girl scout Glory Gold led pioneers across the USA towards California, and *Jane Bond*, an espionage strip crossing James Bond with *The Girl From U.N.C.L.E.*, managed to combine strong storytelling and art and to leave out the xenophobic traces.

Still, **Tina** met with limited, though significant, success. On the home front it failed dismally, being cancelled after only 6 months. Few other countries paid much attention to its syndication possibilities either - but it was an enormous success in The Netherlands. IPC may well have wished for a more comprehensive breakthrough; but the Dutch version of **Tina** thrived until the 1990s, long after most of the British girls' comics had vanished, and provided the publisher with a lasting source of syndication revenue and a foothold on the continent from which, in later decades, it was able to expand into the French and German markets.

But although **Tina** failed to survive in Britain under its own steam, its merger with **Princess**, a title launched by IPC's predecessor Fleetway in 1960, gradually introduced its influence into the genre's mainstream. **Princess**, a somewhat staid title enlivened only by the charming historical romance *Moira, Slave Girl of Rome* and Jenny Butterworth's popular "family" series *The Happy Days*, became revitalised as **Princess Tina**. The international outlook played a part in that; but perhaps more important was another aspect of **Tina**, new to British comics, with which IPC had hoped to tempt foreign publishers – licensed strips based on internationally available toy lines *The Trolls* and *Barbie*. In retrospect it seems clear that the **Tina** treatments of both lines were simply too typically British to have had international appeal; despite its Danish origins *The Trolls* was played as a traditional **Beano**-style slapstick humour strip, while *Barbie* was improbably portrayed as a young English girl working as a model in a small town department store, with Ken as her manager!

It's unsurprising that such localised treatments had no international success – but in the long run they were crucial in bringing the preoccupations of the British girls' comics more in line with the other interests of their readers. Pop star coverage had long been a feature of the genre, but now highly popular girls' toys were in the picture too, helping to give the flagging sales of **Princess** a much-needed boost. In the even longer run it may be argued that the introduction of the licensed strips eventually led to the demise of the genre, as publishers gradually introduced more licensed material and more "real world" features, squeezing out the picture stories and slowly but inexorably transforming the girls' comics into teenybopper magazines.

But no-one ever said that all comics milestones led to the growth and consolidation of the medium. A milestone is just an indicator - and, as a transforming agent in the British girls' genre and a happy memory to several generations of Dutch girls, I think **Tina** meets that qualification.

IN HER JOB AS A MODEL AT BARNARD'S DEPARTMENT STORE, BARBIE HAD THE CHANCE OF WEARING LOTS OF SUPER CLOTHES...
GOSH – WHAT A SIMPLY FABULOUS OUTFIT!
ISN'T IT, THOUGH ? JUST THE RIGHT COLOUR FOR YOU, TOO!

THE BLANK PAGE

Chev talks about a cinematic piece of history...

LIKE BEING BORED?

ONE hundred and fourteen million dollars. Those were the box-office takings for the opening weekend of the *Spider-Man* movie in America. At approximately $8.00 per adult ticket, that means that 14,250,000 Americans paid good money to see *Spider-Man* on its opening weekend. Impressive, for a character whose flagship comic The Amazing Spider-Man sells about 100,000 copies per issue (itself *double* the amount it was selling a year ago, before J Michael Straczynski came onboard as writer).

All of which leaves us in a strange situation, doesn't it? At various times in our lives we've defended the buying of comics to friends and family. We've explained that superheroes aren't necessarily the province of the inane and mentally deficient, despite the comics industry's best attempts at proving otherwise. We've tolerated mainstream journalistic coverage of comics reverting to such clichéd headlines as "Biff! Pow!" while they contemplate how much vintage comics are worth in financial terms rather than as literature. Even then, comics fans couldn't point at the *Batman* film (or even the *Superman* films before it) and say, "That's what comics are *really* like, do you see?" They rarely showed the grace and power, the acrobatics and sheer exuberance of the comic book superhero. Instead we had Christopher Reeve gamely trying to look imposing and god-like in frankly disturbing Lycra, and Michael Keaton attempting to convey a sense of dangerous menace wearing a rubber suit with restrictive eye holes on a cowl that wouldn't even move when he turned his head.

I've always thought of superheroes as being the guilty pleasure of the comics fan, and have avoided lending superhero comics out to friends, preferring to rely on more "acceptable" genres. This is all based on the assumption that superheroes are somehow a product of comics, created within the field and unable to properly exist outside it. And until Blade and the X-Men were made into movies, this had been a sound enough theory.

The *X-Men* movie isn't great comic book material, but it is a pretty good little sci-fi action movie that neither insults nor forgets its roots, turning the X-Men into something that can please fans of the comic while also entertaining people who have never read a comic in their lives. Both of the *Blade* movies stay faithful enough to the comics while dwelling on the horrific aspects, producing an adult movie that most people wouldn't even realise is drawn from comic book sources. The major factor in both of these cases is that *X-Men* and *Blade* are, respectively, sci-fi and horror action movies above and beyond being comic book adaptations. They were written, produced and marketed as such. Superman, previously successful on TV as *Lois & Clark*, has returned to the small screen in *Smallville*. Taking the formula that made *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The X-Files* such a success, it has found a large audience that enjoys the characters' interaction in a setting that has little to do with Superman rather than the altogether more humanistic Clark Kent. These all work *despite* their comic book origins, not because of them.

Spider-Man, on the other hand, looks like a comic book come to life. It's not being marketed as sci-fi, romance, comedy or even a straight action film, although, tangentially, it may be all of those. What every frame of the trailers scream out is, "Spider-Man! How fucking *cool* is *this*?" And it's worked; in just one weekend, 14,250,000 people paid their money to see *exactly* how fucking cool Spider-Man could be, and most reports show that few, if any, of them were disappointed. And yet Spider-Man's best selling comic sells less than 0.7% of those numbers. To look at it another way: at its current rate of sales Amazing Spider-Man would take almost 12 years to reach the same amount of people who saw *Spider-Man* just last weekend (and that's ignoring the fact that the comic sells to the same 100,000 people every issue).

Which begs the question: what is so wrong with comics that we can't reach even a fraction of the people who seem quite able to appreciate Spider-Man on the big screen?

It shouldn't be the price of the modern comic compared with that of a cinema ticket. The Amazing Spider-Man will cost you $2.25 for what may be a twenty-minute read. Given an average of five issues for a complete storyline (or around 100 minutes for a movie), you pay $11.25, which isn't very much of a difference in the long run. Are comics now so out of fashion that a character that gains mainstream acceptance through television or the cinema still cannot be enjoyed in the medium that gave birth to them? Or is reading *anything* deemed so socially unacceptable these days? Are modern consumers so apathetic that only television and movies are considered valid as entertainment, rather than the more cerebral activity of actually taking the effort to read something? Has our disposable society reached the point where the ephemeral joys of a movie or TV show have overtaken the desirability of having a book or comic to enjoy again and again?

So here we are. CGI technology has finally given filmmakers the ability to portray superheroes as they really are in all their incredible, awe-inspiring glory. Coupled with these movies being placed in the hands of younger writers, directors and actors whose familiarity with the comics makes them more respectful of the material, this has given us accurate depictions of comic book superheroes that finally stand as representative of all the action, romance, intrigue and sheer joyfulness that comics can create.

And where does this leave the comics? Already Marvel and DC's upper management seem only tolerant of their comics divisions as places from which to strip-mine viable commodities for other media. Rather than boosting the comics' image by association with big screen blockbusters, I fear that it may well be yet another nail in the coffin. And this time it could be a very big nail.

DON'T READ THIS!

LEARNING CURVES

Sarah Littlehales speculates to accumulate...

YET MORE MOORE

THERE'S been a two year gap between the first series and the new volume, but The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen (below) is still eagerly awaited. The series has continued to intrigue readers with its unique detailed texture in both text and art, providing more than just a simple adventure that happens to feature some of the greatest literary heroes of the Victorian era.

Just as From Hell's featured notes and annotations by Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell showed the amount of research that went into that work, so League displays the tight creative control that Moore demands as part of creating a series. Every silent character and background detail of every panel and every off-handed remark has been analysed to reveal the hidden depths of each character, which in turn displays the amount of background reading and literary research that Moore has gone to.

Set in 1898, League 2 assembles characters including the aging Indian Captain Nemo, Allan Quatermain of King Solomon's Mines fame and Dracula's Mina Harker (under her maiden name Wilhelmina Murray) to create a team of, for want of a better term, "super heroes" for the Victorian British Government. Taking place directly after their last adventure against The Insidious Doctor (more popularly known as Fu Manchu, a name that Moore was unable to use for legal reasons), the League are here set against new, alien adversaries. Clues placed in the last series, including a flash of luminescence from the surface of the Red Planet, the presence of cavorite (for anti-gravity effects) and the constant worry of an aerial bombardment already pointed to the arrival of the Martians. It's War of the Worlds, re-produced by that distinctive combination of Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill.

To add to the constant mystery that's in every panel, fans are expecting more revelations with regards to Britain's "Greatest Detective" after his battle with his arch-nemesis Moriarty in 1891's The Final Problem. Despite his return having been made some three years later (due to popular demand by Arthur Conan Doyle's reading public) Sherlock Holmes is still believed to be dead by all. All except his older, smarter brother, Mycroft. Both Moriarty (now acting as "M" for the Victorian MI5) and Mycroft were featured in the first volume of the League, which leads many fans to believe that their presence heralds the return of Sherlock, and his possible claim as the leader of the League.

The potential for this intricately woven world is almost without bounds. Not only are fans eager to see what and who else is being entwined into this new Victorian science-fiction-cum-steampunk world, but there have been hints that this was not the first League of Extraordinary Gentlemen in existence. This leaves us with the idea that when the adventures of Quatermain and company are over, there might be the chance to see other Leagues in action. It has already been hinted that Percy Blakeney (The Scarlet Pimpernel), Fanny Hill and Lemuel Gulliver (Gulliver's Travels) were once involved with the organisation.

So it would seem that despite the lengths between stories, there is no end to the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen's possibilities and popularity in sight.

MORE CARTOON COMIC CAPERS

Many still haven't seen it, but the overwhelming consensus from those who have is that *Samurai Jack* is the best thing to grace the small screen since the Bruce Timm-inspired *Batman: The Animated Series*. Created, written and directed by *Dexter's Laboratory* creator Genndy Tartakovsky, *Jack* displays the same visual flair as *Dexter's Lab* and *The Powerpuff Girls*, retains the same sense of humour, but shows its new futuristic world in a grim and dark light. It's a Wizard of Oz-type tale where the hero perpetually journeys to return home, although in this case that also involves going back in time.

Stylistically more mature, it exceeds anything that the Cartoon Network has previously produced. Shapes and characters are still sleek and visually dynamic, but the thick black outline around figures has now been lost. Gone and not replaced; the colours crisply press against each other. Backgrounds vary according to the vast array of landscapes and culture. Cities aren't just dank and polluted, but are over-populated with aliens and bounty hunters. In the vast mutated forests of the world live varieties of monstrous-looking creatures, and often down-trodden peace-loving civilisations.

Having made his debut at the San Diego Comic Con 2001 on a promotional CD-Rom, *Samurai Jack* has always been a crossover hit with the comics-reading community. Now however, he's getting his own comic. A one-off special that is, thankfully, written by Tartakovsky looks set to retell the origin of *Jack*. While the concept of reading something that's already been told in a feature length pilot episode and in the opening credits of every episode doesn't exactly send chills of excitement running down your spine, it is a curious concept. For something that's so action filled, where split screens streak fluid action out of the traditional television boundaries, and where tense moody silences speak volumes about the character of Samurai Jack, it begs the question "just how will DC Comics pull it off?".

The proof of the pudding is in the tasting, so all the *Samurai Jack*, *Powerpuff Girls*, *Dexter's Laboratory*, *Batman: The Animated Series* and *Batman Beyond* fans will have to wait and see.

MAN ON A MISSION

Martin Shipp's vision of a better comics industry takes a back seat to some extraordinary madness...

DC COMICS today announced that it has signed the comicbook characters Superman and Batman to exclusive contracts. A spokesman for the publisher said: "DC has always admired and respected Superman and Batman's work in the comicbook character community, and it is a great pleasure for us to have them working exclusively for DC."

The new contracts mean the characters will appear in DC comics only, each receiving a minimum of four "above-the-title" books per month with an unspecified number of guest-shots, spin-offs, team-ups, overpriced Prestige format *Elseworlds* specials and hardback graphic novels to be published on an ad hoc, ad lib, ad-filled basis.

Asked if the new contracts would mean no further inter-company cross-over books, a spokesman for DC said: "There's still money in those, isn't there?"

In response, Marvel Comics has announced that exclusive contracts have been signed with everybody whose name is Max. Under the new contracts, people called Max will receive their name on the cover of certain Marvel comics and in return will give Marvel a sum of money equivalent to the cover price of that comic. A Mr. B. Jemas said: "Imagine if your name could be on the cover of a Marvel Comic! Your own personalised cover! Well, we're doing that exclusively with guys named Max! Of course it'll cost 'em a buck or three, but isn't it worth that?" When it was pointed out that Max Comics do not carry the Marvel logo and are considered a separate imprint, a Mr. Jemas responded: "For God's sake shut up!"

Dark Horse Comics also made an announcement: it has reached an agreement with its logo that it will appear exclusively on their comics for at least the next twelve months. At the end of the period, the logo may option to return to its former career as a chess piece.

In response, Marvel Comics has announced that after long talks with its legal representatives it has retrospective exclusive agreements with anybody who has ever used the phrase "Make Mine Marvel", either verbally or in print. Under the contract, the user of the phrase has agreed that they will never ever read another comic published by companies other than Marvel, under punishment of having their homes and families taken away and used for basketball practice by Joe Quesada.

Stan Lee has announced that he has finalised an exclusive contract with the reader of Just Imagine Stan Lee And... Under the terms of the contract, the reader will never mention the series again, and we can all pretend it never happened.

In a shock turn of events, Kevin Smith and J. Michael Straczynski, despite both already being under exclusive contract to Marvel Comics, have signed further exclusive contracts with their bodies. The corporeal forms will work solely for Smith and Straczynski for a period that has yet to be finalised, although Smith has stated that he hopes this will be "for a long time yet, dude". The bodies will, in exchange for Smith and Straczynski's motive forces and controlling intelligences, provide services such as consumption and digestion of food; elimination of waste; work processing including typing and typing a bit quicker; certain aesthetic services; and provision of sexual gratification (subject to age and status).

Stan Lee has made a further announcement: he has signed an exclusive contract with his hairpiece. The toupee has agreed to make several public appearances with Lee in exchange for regular feeding with Baby Bio.

It has just been announced by the comicbook character Batman that he is now under exclusive contract to Mr. Bruce Wayne. Wayne, described as a "millionaire playboy", will use the Batman character as an alter-ego and as a means for the expression of repressed guilt and revenge after seeing his parents gunned down in cold blood, an event scheduled for next week. The Batman's press statement read: "I am pleased to be part of the Bruce Wayne group of personas. Besides, he's got far more money than some dumb-ass comicbook company. You got any idea how much insurance is for a Batmobile?"

This just in: the Dark Horse logo has exercised its option to return to its former career as a chess piece. The logo's announcement reads: "I would like to thank Dark Horse Comics for the time and effort they have invested in my career during my time with them. I have found, however, that as a chess piece I enjoy the undivided attention of logical, intelligent, thinking participants; something I have never enjoyed during my years at Dark Horse."

Mr. Peter A David has signed an exclusive contract with the readers of his comicbook series Captain Marvel. Under the contract's terms, Mr. A David will personally provide each reader of the series with one dollar to be put towards the book's purchase price, provided the reader then telephones Mr. J. Quesada and Mr. B. Jemas and blows a raspberry before hanging up and giggling like a schoolgirl.

advertisement

CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Kevin Schomburg continues his search for the perfect graphic albums from around the world...

Cosey's Saigon – Hanoi

COSEY (Swiss writer/artist Bernard Cosendai) is probably best known for his adventure series **Jonathan**. That epic, the thirteenth instalment of which has just seen publication, has earned the author wide international fame and success. In 1993, however, he was awarded the "Best Scenario" prize at the Angoulême comics festival for this much quieter work.

On first inspection **Saigon – Hanoi** does not tell much of a story at all – it almost appears to consist of setting alone. Only at second glance, and then a careful third reading, does the visual and compositional beauty of this unusual album reveal its true depth – at least, to me it did, and it took me 7 years between first and second readings!

Saigon – Hanoi is set in Clear Creek, a small town in snowy, rural USA on December 31. Vietnam veteran Homer Hamlin spends New Year's Eve in his deceased parents' house. While watching a documentary about a former GI returning to Vietnam on TV, he gets a chance phone call from Felicity, an eleven year old girl. During their long talk over the phone it becomes apparent that Homer is the GI in the documentary. And while he and Felicity talk about life, the world, friends, relatives and the meaning of it all a truly overwhelming flood of images is presented to them on the TV screen.

Apparently unconnected, the imagery and the text parallel each other until it becomes noticeable

that the sensitive dialogue explains it all. Saigon (to) Hanoi is the route the travelling GI has taken to get reacquainted with the country, which has changed drastically since his last visit - from a nation torn apart by war between two opposing ideologies, Vietnam has turned into a vibrant place full of life and laughter. And Saigon (to) Hanoi is also the route to Homer's personal Heart of Darkness, which he conquers easily due to his lust for life and his friendly demeanour. Unlike Joseph Conrad's Marlow, however, Homer is recompensed for his travels; in Vietnam he finds a lost innocence which is confirmed by the girl Felicity, who in turn seems to be a lot older than she really is.

When reading the "easy" dialogue of Cosey's album and marvelling at the picture-postcard scenery which is presented in a strongly aspect-related context, one is struck by the sudden realization that Homer and Felicity are not the only two people with a story behind them. It is the artist's frequent visualization of individual Vietnamese people, either in contact with the travelling veteran or concerned with their personal lives but all connected by the Saigon – Hanoi route which somehow also runs past Homer and Felicity, that is the true essence of the album.

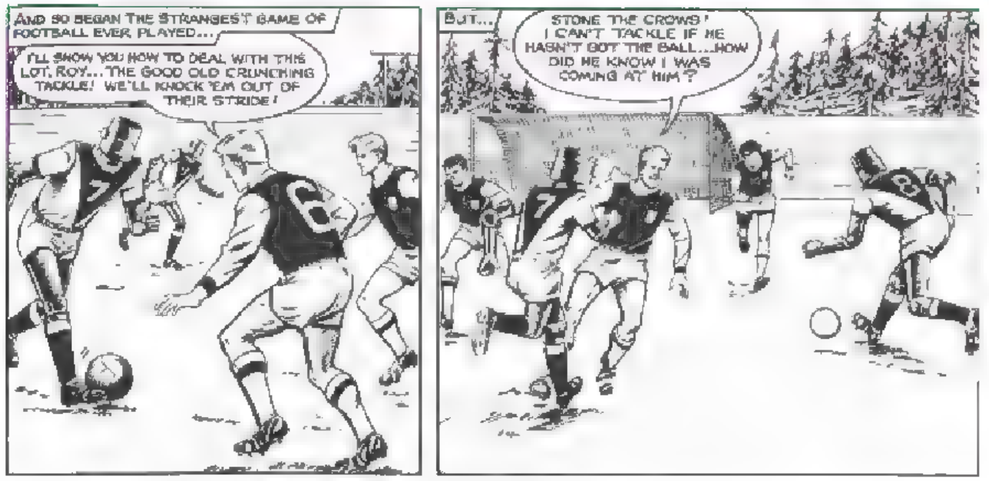
And in understanding this Homer can be at peace with himself, can let go of the friend he had lost in the war and the sorrow he has piled up since. In the end it is the understanding that nobody needs to be lonely and unhappy, that everyone can find a friend somewhere, which makes Homer drive off at the end with a smug smile on his face, more comfy than he has ever been since he returned from Vietnam after the war.

I did mention that it was deeper than it appeared at first glance, didn't I?

Saigon – Hanoi *is a 46 page hardback album by Cosey, published by Dupuis for €12.35. Other important works by Cosey are the adventure series* ***Jonathan****, and the romances* ***A la Recherche de Peter Pan*** *and* ***Voyage en Italie.***
Heart of Darkness *by Joseph Conrad is a novel more than 200 pages long with almost no pictures, available from Penguin Books for £3.50 or less.*

SOME PEOPLE ARE ON THE PITCH

As football fans across the world sit back and raise a beer to the World Cup Finals in Japan and Korea, Jennifer Cole laments the decline of the English football comic.


AND SO BEGAN THE STRANGEST GAME OF FOOTBALL EVER PLAYED...
I'LL SHOW YOU HOW TO DEAL WITH THIS LOT, ROY... THE GOOD OLD CRUNCHING TACKLE! WE'LL KNOCK 'EM OUT OF THEIR STRIDE!
BUT...
STONE THE CROWS! I CAN'T TACKLE IF HE HASN'T GOT THE BALL... HOW DID HE KNOW I WAS COMING AT HIM?

CHANCES are you're reading this in between one World Cup game and the next – eagerly awaiting England's next match-winning performance as we storm towards our first World Cup victory in 42 years. Or maybe you're not, because you're a comics fan, and football is part of that outdoors, fresh-air and sunshine business that comics fans just don't do. But it wasn't always that way. Go back a decade or so, and as well as flicking through the sports channels you could have followed the England team's progress in football comics. Football comics in which Beckham and Co. might have achieved a fictional victory even if Our Brave Lads couldn't deliver the goods in the real world. But you have to search hard for British football comics nowadays.

What makes this even sadder is that when David Beckham's injury-time equaliser against Greece sent England into the World Cup Finals, more than one critic remembered their obligation to describe the events as "Roy of the Rovers' style". In fact, the entire saga of Beckham's career - his pop star wife, his growth from an undoubtedly talented but nonetheless petulant brat of a boy into the Greatest Living Englishman – would make a perfect plot for a strip… if only there was a *Roy of the Rovers* anymore.

For more than four decades, *Roy of the Rovers* and football derring-do went hand in hand. Countless children grew up anticipating Melchester (and later, briefly, Walford) Rovers' results just as much as Manchester United's. Every time a World Cup came round, Roy would either be part of the squad or, if circumstances had conspired against his selection,

THOUGH JASON CHARGED HIM VICIOUSLY, ROY MANAGED TO FLICK THE BALL TO ANDY McDONALD, HIS CENTRE-HALF, BEFORE HE FELL SPRAWLING IN THE MUD

Rovers would jet off to the appropriate part of the world to cheer on Our Lads regardless. But today "real Roy of the Rovers stuff" is in danger of becoming a term used by commentators who never read an issue of the comic to describe events to listeners who've never read one either. And it's not just Roy who's finally hung up his boots. There is only one football comic, a monthly digest, still on the British newsstands. What went wrong? Football has always been a national obsession in this country. That hasn't changed, so it must be media changes, not the sporting climate, that holds the clues.

Roy Race first pulled on a youth team shirt for Melchester Rovers in the pages of **Tiger**, an Amalgamated Press boys' adventure weekly, in 1954 and graduated to his own comic 22 years later. As well as Roy's own strip, the first issue of IPC's **Roy Of The Rovers** (cover-dated 25th September 1976) contained seven others. All (unsurprisingly) featured football in one form or another, from schoolboy kickabouts to First Division superstars, and were supported by articles about, and pin-ups of, real players. In general, adventures tended towards the mundane rather than the fantastical – virtually everything that happened in *Roy of the Rovers* could, just about, happen on one of England's pitches somewhere over a weekend. At the time, however, that didn't seem to matter. Videos were not yet a part of living room furniture, satellite TV was still something out of science fiction, and live football on TV was a decade away. A football fan's week consisted of *Match of the Day* late on a Saturday evening, and a few midweek highlights if you were lucky. Otherwise, you had to get out of your armchair and stand in sub-zero rain for a couple of hours. Everything in *Roy of the Rovers* might well have been going on somewhere in the country, but you weren't necessarily getting to see it. Comics were your quick and easy football fix.

As live matches, Sky TV and video games proliferated, football comics had to offer something different if they were going to survive. Bizarre elements began to creep in – for example, a late 1970s story called *Simon's Secret* was about a footballer with bionic implants. By now a distinct trend was developing: several of **Roy of the Rovers**' pages were being given over to biographical strips about real football heroes, forcing the fiction they sat beside to differ in more and more ludicrous ways. In 1981 Roy was shot by a disgruntled actor who believed the Melchester player-manager was trying to destroy his career. He remained in a coma for around 25 episodes of what was now undoubtedly a soccer soap. When Roy recovered, his team showed their appreciation by winning 14-0. More ludicrous still was the 1985 addition of Martin Kemp and Steve Norman – then members of chart band Spandau Ballet - to the strip's cast. They briefly provided a solid midfield in what can only be assumed was a bonkers ploy to convince prepubescent girls to pick up their brothers' comics...

By the time the comic was cancelled early in 1993, far more space was devoted to *Shoot!/ Match* style reportage than to fiction. The final issue ended with Roy once again on the brink of death after a helicopter crash. When the comic returned a year later with a more adult theme and grim post-modernism in place of the soap-opera whimsy, it bombed. Nevertheless, Roy bounced back once more in *Match of the Day* magazine's strip segment in May 1997, carrying on as Melchester Rovers' manager until the magazine's demise in October 2001.

Realism obviously wasn't the way to go, but would the opposite

have appealed any more to today's comic readers?

Other football strips, in less subject-specific boys' adventure comics, ranged from the mundane to the truly bizarre. Sandwiched between the jungle warriors and battle heroes of such titles as DC Thomson's **Hotspur** and **Buddy**, soccer strips managed to provide plenty of entertainment for those of us broadminded enough to accept that a barefooted gypsy could play for England – even if he was born on the moon. The company's longest-running footballing son was "Limp-Along Leslie" who proved that your legs didn't *have* to be the same length if you wanted to play for England, and that there's nothing like practicing among a herd of sheep and a couple of horses to improve your heading; but then football often seemed superfluous to the plot. Leslie spent far more time chasing sheep worriers and apprehending local good-for-nothings than he did on the field, as though the writers had long since decided that no-one had time for football strips based in any kind of reality.

Even when football *was* central to the plot, DC Thomson could always be relied on to deliver more bizarre elements. In future-set *The Man Who Lived Three Times* Dave Stannard restored football to its rightful place as Britain's national sport, years after it had been forgotten. His dubious reward was to referee the first resurrected Cup Final. Sport resurrected by a wannabe match official – could even a cloned army of Vinnie Joneses have been a more terrifying prospect?

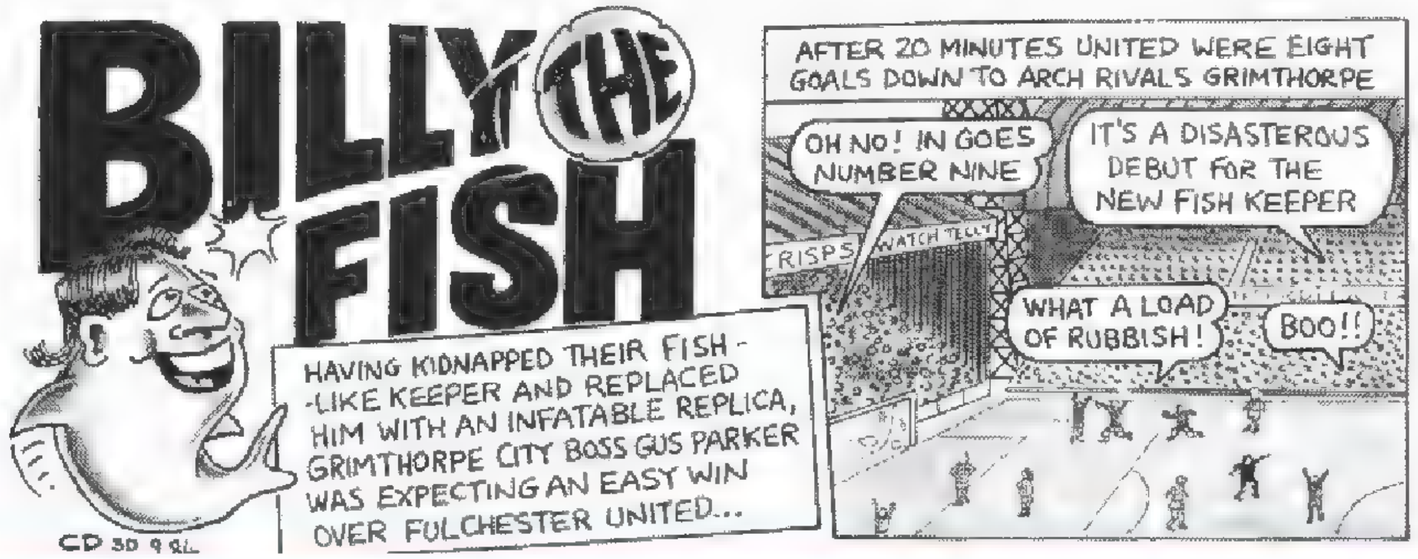
DC Thomson's greatest moment was *Three on the Ball*, in which three Tibetan monks – leaders of the Secret Society of Vashna – used their mystic powers to help struggling Vale Albion FC. The monks' motivation? They were worried that as the large Vs on Albion's shirts were identical to the sacred sign of Vashna, the club's poor league results might disgrace and anger their god.

For what I'd say is the greatest football strip of all time, however, we need to go back to IPC. Perched unceremoniously between the imaginatively titled *Jimmy of the City*, *Bobby of the Blues* and *Jack of United* was **Scorcher and Score**'s *Spy Between the Sticks*. Spider Logan, the goalkeeper of second division Bentford City, was being blackmailed into carrying out various spying missions by the club's chairman – the head of an international spy organisation. If Spider didn't comply, the Major would destroy the club! In the background of the espionage shenanigans, which were loopy enough on their own, readers also had to contend with the unrelated subplot that world peace somehow depended on Bentford winning the European Cup. This meant that as well as fighting off foreign agents, Spider also had to ensure that he made it to the stadium for kick off. In between, the intrepid goalie found himself stealing everything from priceless diamonds to old sandwich wrappers, not to mention toy planes that tried to bomb his bacon and eggs. And still he had to dodge shots from opposing centre-forwards. The strip was a breath of fresh air amongst the rest of the comic, most of which was fairly pedestrian – though *The Forward who Went Back* about a time-travelling striker, deserves an honourable mention.

These days the British football strip survives – but not in the weekly comics. *The Sun* and *The Mirror* newspapers both sport daily football adventures of their own, positioned on the traditional comics page rather than in the sports section. In dodging the Mafia, angry girlfriends and brothel madams as well as late tackles *The Sun*'s **Striker**, by Peter Nash, deviates more from the touchline than his counterpart **Scorer** - by Barrie Tomlinson, John Gillatt and David Pugh - in the *Daily Mirror*, although both strips pit their fictional teams against actual Premiership sides. **Striker**, through its use of Maya 3D software and CGI, drops real soccer stars into its narrative. Middlesborough FC even has its own artist-in-residence: sometime Vertigo artist Richard Rayner. A fun selection of online small press football strips can be found at *http://www.urban75.org/comics/index.html*. A one-shot Millennium **Roy of the Rovers Annual** appeared in 1999. A single British comic devoted to the sport survives in DC Thomson's **Football Picture Monthly**, a digest-sized series of non-serial one-shot stories. **Viz** continues to fly the flag with *Billy The Fish* and other bizarre parodies. But somehow none of it's quite the same as waiting to see if Melchester Rovers will get the last minute equaliser that will save the day and restore national pride.

Then again, when we've got David Beckham stepping up to a 30-yard free kick in the dying seconds, who needs fiction?

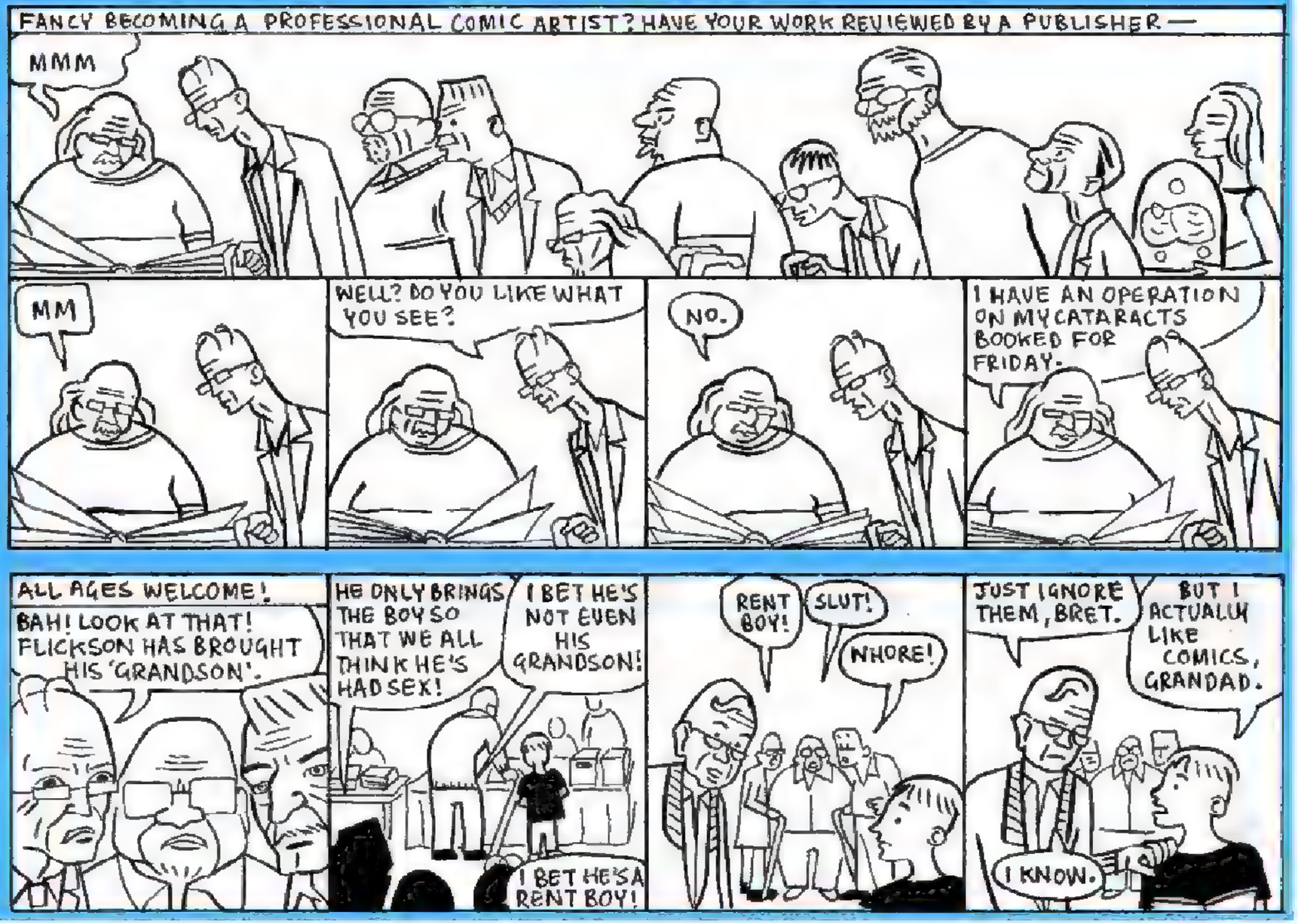
BUT ROY WAS FOLLOWING UP... AND HE SCORED A SPLIT SECOND BEFORE THE REFEREE BLEW FOR THE LAST TIME...
YESSSSSSSSS!
MELCHESTER ROVERS 3, STROBERG 2.


BILLY THE FISH
HAVING KIDNAPPED THEIR FISH -LIKE KEEPER AND REPLACED HIM WITH AN INFATABLE REPLICA, GRIMTHORPE CITY BOSS GUS PARKER WAS EXPECTING AN EASY WIN OVER FULCHESTER UNITED...
AFTER 20 MINUTES UNITED WERE EIGHT GOALS DOWN TO ARCH RIVALS GRIMTHORPE
OH NO! IN GOES NUMBER NINE
IT'S A DISASTEROUS DEBUT FOR THE NEW FISH KEEPER
CRISPS
WATCH TELLY
WHAT A LOAD OF RUBBISH!
BOO!!

COMICS 2040

MEET THE STARS OF YOU FAVOURITE SCI-FI TV SHOWS—
TAKE THAT FOR BEING IN THE CRAPIEST STAR TREK EVER, 'MALCOLM REED'!
TAKE THAT FOR BEING A GUEST AT A COMIC CONVENTION WHEN GENRE TV HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH COMICS AND THEREFORE UNDERMINING THE ART FORM WE LOVE!
I LIKE HITTING PEOPLE!

FIND OUT WHO THIS YEAR'S MOST POPULAR COMIC CREATORS ARE AT THE AWARD CEREMONY— BEST WRITER: ALAN MOORE...
WHO, UNFORTUNATELY, IS UNABLE TO MAKE IT THIS YEAR, SO I'LL COLLECT HIS AWARD ON HIS BEHALF...
BEST ARTIST: FRANK MILLER...
WHO, UNFORTUNATELY, IS UNABLE TO MAKE IT THIS YEAR, SO I'LL COLLECT HIS AWARD ON HIS BEHALF...
BEST ASSOCIATE EDITOR WITH ONE HAND: KERRY LARRY...
WHO, UNFORTUNATELY, IS UNABLE TO MAKE IT THIS YEAR, SO I'LL COLLECT HIS/HER AWARD ON HIS/HER BEHALF...


FANCY BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL COMIC ARTIST? HAVE YOUR WORK REVIEWED BY A PUBLISHER—
MMM
MM
WELL? DO YOU LIKE WHAT YOU SEE?
NO.
I HAVE AN OPERATION ON MY CATARACTS BOOKED FOR FRIDAY.
ALL AGES WELCOME!
BAH! LOOK AT THAT! FLICKSON HAS BROUGHT HIS 'GRANDSON'.
HE ONLY BRINGS THE BOY SO THAT WE ALL THINK HE'S HAD SEX!
I BET HE'S NOT EVEN HIS GRANDSON!
I BET HE'S A RENT BOY!
RENT BOY!
SLUT!
WHORE!
JUST IGNORE THEM, BRET.
BUT I ACTUALLY LIKE COMICS, GRANDAD.
I KNOW.

Click on Globe returns to contents

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT, ALPHA?

STRONTIUM Dog was one of 2000AD's most enduring series, a futuristic spaghetti western saga where fallout of radioactive Strontium 90 had caused the birth of a mutant underclass. Unable to take normal jobs, they had to resort to the ones no-one else would do. Many became bounty hunters, known as Search/Destroy Agents (nicknamed Strontium Dogs by scornful norms), chasing down the galaxy's most wanted across the new frontier. An added twist came with the revelation that Nelson Bunker Kreelman, father of lead character Johnny Alpha, was the politico at the heart of the laws against mutantkind, with his son a dirty little secret. Young Johnny Kreelman joined the resistance against his father, taking the surname Alpha because of his mutation: His eyes were able to emit alpha rays which allowed him to see through solid walls and it's suggested he could pierce a man's soul with his dead-eyed stare. The series was peppered with an array of James Bond gadgets, such as the Electronux (electrically-charged knuckle dusters), Time Bombs (able to remove an area from time and space for several hours, returning when the planet has moved on, thus condemning the victim to an airless death in space) and Alpha's hand weapon of choice, the Westinghouse variable-cartridge blaster.

Originally created by John Wagner and Carlos Ezquerra for 2000AD's short-lived sister comic Star Lord, when the two comics merged *Strontium Dog* joined the first rank of 2000AD's best. In time, Wagner left the series in the hands of his regular co-writer Alan Grant for the majority of its run. In 1990, when he felt *Strontium Dog* had run out of steam, Grant wrote *The Final Solution*, giving Alpha his swansong in 2000AD Prog 687. The series turned to a number of spin-offs featuring the supporting cast of thousands - but readers still hungered for more of the original.

It would be another ten years before 2000AD would see the return of the character in any form other than flashbacks. Instead of trying to work a way round Alpha's death, creators John Wagner and Carlos Ezquerra decided to go back to the roots of the series and produce a new incarnation. The previous run should now be considered apocryphal – legends that sprang up around the character at some future point. The new version, which began in December 1999, is intended to be the true account, allowing Wagner to fine-tune the concept with hindsight, and erase any details that don't jibe with his vision. Some of the motivation for the new series came from a series bible that Wagner produced for an aborted attempt to bring *Strontium Dog* to the small screen. In the wake of this mismatch comes another, more successful attempt to adapt the series for another medium, with Big Finish's *2000AD Presents* range of CD audio adventures. Of the initial batch of six stories announced so far, only one is written by a creator who has had no previous connection with 2000AD, either as writer or editor. That man is Jonathan Clements, the author of *Strontium Dog: Down To Earth*. This is his story...

SEARCH/ DESTROY AGENT

Jay Eales spoke to writer and manga authority Jonathan Clements shortly before the recording of his audio play Strontium Dog: Down To Earth.

JONATHAN Clements' first writing assigment was the Elvis Presley film *Blue Hawaii* - he translated it into Japanese for his landlady in Osaka, and was paid with an orange spongecake. For his anime work *The Sunday Times* has called him "the medium's most sought-after translator" – he's written the English versions of dozens of Japanese comics and animations, including *Street Fighter II*, *The Cockpit*, *Grey: Digital Target*, and *Sol Bianca*. He has also translated ancient Chinese ballads, lyrics for pop songs, and the haiku collection **Moon in the Pines**. He has written for several film and game projects in Japan and Europe, most of which are stuck in production hell. He is the author of over a dozen books, and the first *Strontium Dog* audio drama, *Down to Earth*.

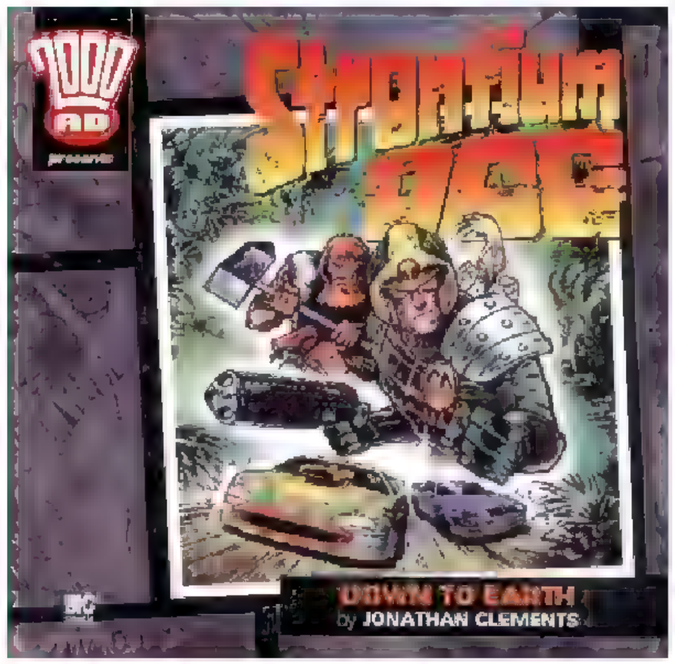
In preparation for this article, a Google search on Clements' name produced some... *interesting*

results. Clements told **Borderline**: "Oh, right… There was a porno writer in the 1960s who used Jonathan Clements as a pseudonym. People often think I wrote *Keep it Kinky* and *Mummy I've Been Ravished*, but they were published before I was born." *[OK, but what about the books on money management and the column for the Wall Street Journal?? – Googling Production Editor]*

His first comics job was translating **Ironfist Chinmi** for Bloomsbury in 1995, followed by a period spent writing for **Action Man**. This was during the six-month period when Northern & Shell (now the owners of the *Daily Express*) thought they wanted a children's publishing division. Clements' job brief was to write fake articles about Action Man's international exploits. He did so in the form of a series of spoof newspapers such as *The Sung* (a Manchurian tabloid) and the *New York Rap Sheet*.

Clements' time on **Action Man** was short but eventful. He explained: "We answered to two licensors at Hasbro, who I'll just call Good Cop and The Whingeing Serpent. Good Cop enjoyed the humour and realised that it would add value for adult readers - we used to get letters from parents saying that their kids loved the adventure stuff, but they were cracking up over the in-jokes. I did a spoof of Hugh Grant's arrest (with Doctor X done for kerb-crawling in Paris), and a pastiche of Bob Hoskins' BT ads "It's good to talk" (a beginner's guide to torture). Stuff like that. The Whingeing Serpent hated it.

"Action Man's enemy, Doctor X, become my hero. I started running the Ask Doctor X letters page, where kids could write in to be Minion of the Month. For the annuals we did later, that was transformed into *Skullman!*, which was a pastiche of *Hello!* magazine, "for high-class minions". I also got to write the *Doctor X* back-up strip.



"We had a great time, but were very soon fired. **Action Man** was doing a respectable 50,000 an issue, but N&S were comparing the sales with *Penthouse*, and decided that we were all idiots (after that, the licence ended up at Marvel)."

Clements woke up the next day, and realised he'd just become a full-time freelancer. After that, he wrote a few books, translated **Gunsmith Cats** for a while, and got roped in as a writer on a short-lived attempt to adapt the **Destroyer** books [created by Warren Murphy and Richard Sapir, and the basis of the Fred Ward film *Remo: Unarmed & Dangerous*] into comics. Rehired to work on the **Action Man** and **Sindy** annuals, in what seems to be a mainly English trend of comics titles being cancelled but the annuals going on almost forever, Clements took the opportunity to have a little fun along the way: "I don't think Hasbro ever worked out my *Sindy Song* was set to the tune of *Deutschland Uber Alles*."

After this, he spent two years editing the UK *Manga Max* magazine, which he recalls as an experience not unlike herding cats.

Next up, Clements was hired, along with Simon Jowett (who he already knew from working on **Action Man**), to write 12 episodes of *Halcyon Sun*, an interactive webcast sci-fi series. In Clements' own words: "Each episode was about 20 minutes story and 20 minutes gameplay, all downloadable for free. One reviewer called it "*Ally McBeal* in space". He was trying to be insulting, but I was very pleased. We had some good stuff going on in that series; it got to be very

popular on the *Babylon Five* newsgroups. Apparently it's just been re-released on a CD-ROM. You could call it a flight sim with long cut-scenes, or you could call it a two-hour animated movie with battles you can take part in."

Since then, Clements has done a lot more script work, though he is unable to discuss them thanks to all sorts of embargos and gag orders. In 2001 he wrote three new episodes of a famous sci-fi puppet show which, while paying the rent, probably won't see the light of day. He also wrote a feature-length script for a computer game. Speaking of the nature of that particular business, Clements told **Borderline**: "The money's great, but entire years of your life get buried in confidentiality clauses – you're only as good as your last job, and it's frustrating not to be able to talk about some of the best projects you've worked on."

He came to the attention of Big Finish through work he was doing for the Sci-Fi Channel. Sci-Fi were interested in putting *Halcyon Sun* on their website, if the price was right. Big Finish's John Ainsworth, (producer of the *2000AD Presents* line), was also working for Sci-Fi at the time, and so bore Clements in mind when it came time to start casting around for suitable writers for the new range.

Waxing lyrical about his love for *Strontium Dog*, Clements commented: "I like Johnny Alpha's past. He's an exiled prince waiting to reclaim the throne. His origin story is a movie just waiting to happen - son of fascist dictator turns out to be a member of the persecuted minority, runs away from home, leads resistance. Wins but is exiled. The high concept is sitting right there. Like all the best myths, it blows very familiar family tensions (father-mother-brother-sister) into all-out war. It's got some great contemporary angles, too - disability, prejudice, asylum-seekers… and this is all there during the space-cowboy

bounty-hunter stories, hanging over his head like the Sword of Damocles."

Getting into the nitty-gritty of how he approaches his work, Clements explained: "When I write, I list the things I can and can't do. Then I try and turn these limitations to my advantage. It's a great way of working when producers say things like: 'We need to ensure that there is a five-minute chase sequence we can re-format as an amusement-park ride', and you end up trying to think of a way to work it into the story. I thrive on that kind of stuff. I let the limitations do the storylining for me.

"The requirements for *SD* were pretty obvious. Everyone remembers *SD*, or at least pretends to. But if you ask most of them exactly what happens in the classic chapters, it all goes vague. 'There's this guy, Johnny Alpha, and he's a bounty hunter. And he's got a big Viking guy with him called Wulf.' That's what you get if you're lucky. So I have to fill in the blanks about the characters and the milieu. Johnny and Wulf both have pretty detailed back-stories, and they need to be summarised, particularly for the benefit of any listeners who are too young to remember the originals. I figured the best way to do that would be to engineer a trip home for them, even though Johnny is supposed to be an exile.

"*SD* is the Wild West in space, so I thought I'd take the characters away from the lawless frontier, back down to grotty, humdrum, urban Earth. Then I'd take them to the most backward part of Earth there was; almost like a trip back to the 21st century. Leave them there for just long enough to remind people why the hell they left, and then set everything up so that the rest of the series can leap back out into space with all the rayguns and space-perps we know and love."

Down To Earth is not an adaptation of an old story, but it does make use of familiar characters and situations. Clements was keen to remain true to the series: "I hate it when a new writer comes in and chucks everything out - it's a sure sign that they don't know what they're doing. Any idiot can say 'Yeah, I kind of remember the originals, but I couldn't be arsed to read the comics again, so I just made them all dolphin trainers and added a talking giraffe.' You owe it to the creators to do something in the spirit of the original."

The author feels that *Strontium Dog* works especially well with the audio medium, because the original comics are dripping with dialects: "Audio character differentiation is that much easier when you have a Viking, a Scot, and a four-armed alien with two mouths (at least I assume the Gronk has two mouths – the speech balloons always point at his snout, even though he eats through his belly)."

Clements found the most difficult note to hit was the humour. *Strontium Dog* is a very funny strip, but the humour often flew over the heads of the readers: "Well, they flew over my head when *I* was seven, anyway. I was initially worried that two of the characters, Wulf and the Gronk, would initially come across as too campy for anyone to take it seriously. That's the thing with *SD*, it's *deadly* serious. The stuff happening might be downright funny, but it's like *Star Wars* – the characters treat it with the utmost sobriety. The comics can be very surreal, but while you might laugh at their world, *they* never do. So I thought I'd find a way to keep Wulf out for a while, while people got used to the other voices and the general tone. So, I thought, "I know, Wulf gets kidnapped, and Johnny has to get him back." Once I'd answered the question "Who would want to kidnap Wulf?" I had my story."

Wanting a female character in the foreground, to give a greater variety of voices, Clements suggested a team-up between Johnny and Durham Red (a fellow SD Agent, with a mutation that resembled vampirism). But **2000AD Megazine** editor Alan Barnes reminded him that it wouldn't fit the continuity - *Durham Red* wasn't introduced into the strip until the story *Bitch* (Prog 505), whereas any story with Wulf in it has to be set before his death in the *Max Bubba* arc (Prog 445). Clements told **Borderline**: "[Alan Barnes] said that, not me. I couldn't pull issue-numbers off the top of my head like that. He suggested I use Middenface McNulty instead. Not quite as attractive, but great fun to write for."

The biggest problem facing them was Johnny himself, as the character is notoriously taciturn. Clements needed to put him in situations that required talking: "or, at least, shouting while brandishing firearms, because normally he doesn't say much, and that's no fun on radio. So I set him up with a new supporting character, a motormouth bounty hunter who just never stops talking, a character with real verbal diarrhoea. Johnny keeps his laconic one-line put-downs as a result, but he gets more chances to say them."

Clements vaguely recalls reading *Strontium Dog* in his first appearances in **Star Lord**, but the first **2000AD** he remembers reading was an annual, likely to have been the 1979 edition: "I cherished every page of it. I wish I still had a copy. I'd love to know which writers were responsible, because two lines in particular have stayed with me all these years. One was M.A.C.H. 1 being told that an ice hockey goalie was expendable, and leaping in front of a speeding puck shouting 'Not to me, computer!' The other was a line from *Dan Dare*, about refugees forced to live for generations in dark tunnels: 'The young among us saw, but dimly.' I've always liked that; sounds like something out of **Beowulf**. I also have fond memories of all those dying Volgans screaming

'Aiiiieeeee!' in *Invasion*."

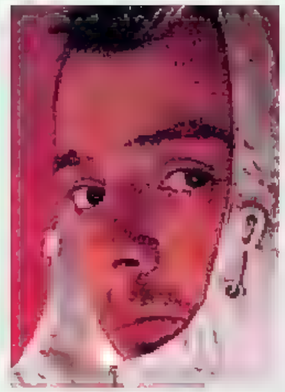
Clements hopes to continue his relationship with Big Finish: "If they ask me back, it might be fun to do a kind of *Police Camera Action*, except the TV crew are following Johnny and Wulf. I've got an idea for a story about Vishnu Patel, a six-armed mutant from Bradford. Also a pitch called *Strontium God*, about a fugitive conman who tells gullible aliens that if a man with eyes of fire falls from the sky, he's the Angel of Death. But in the end, that's all up to Big Finish. They might put me on another character, in which case, I get to hear Judge Dredd say 'The first rule is, you do not talk about *Fat Club'*, or maybe something about Rogue Trooper and one of the Dolls [female Genetic Infantrymen] - yeah, *Blue Velvet*. And, you know what? I don't think Judge Dredd has spent enough time in the Far East..."

In the meantime, Clements is spending his days squinting at tiny squiggles in old Chinese books for **The Pirate Kings of Taiwan**: "It's the true story of a family of warlords in the late Ming dynasty. They started off as smugglers, but became the leaders of the resistance when the Manchus invaded. It's a great story, with excitement, adventure, incest, aliens posing as gods, microwave cannons, evil Jesuits, good Jesuits, a man poking his own eye out, someone eating his own fingers, a private army of black ex-slaves, and a pretty Dutch girl imprisoned in a harem. The hero's mother is a samurai princess who takes on 30 Manchus single-handed, kills them all, then slits her own throat and falls from the burning battlements of her castle. Compared to 17th century China, *Strontium Dog* is kitchen-sink realism for me."

Asked if there were other **2000AD** characters he'd like to take a crack at, Clements commented: "It's a privilege to work on any of them, so I'll take what I'm given. I've always thought that *Nemesis* [*The Warlock*, an alien freedom fighter against a corrupt human empire, created by Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill] or *Slaine* [Celtic barbarian hero, created by Pat and Angie Mills] would present all sorts of thorny problems for audio, so I bet I could have fun trying to solve them. I've already come up with a *Bad Company* [a future war saga from the pens of Peter Milligan, Brett Ewins and Jim McCarthy] idea. How could you resist an audio drama called *Band of Mothers*?"

Strontium Dog: Down To Earth *is due for release on 4th June 2002, priced £9.99.*

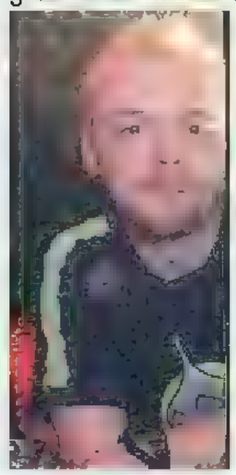
TAKING ALPHA DOWN A PEGG



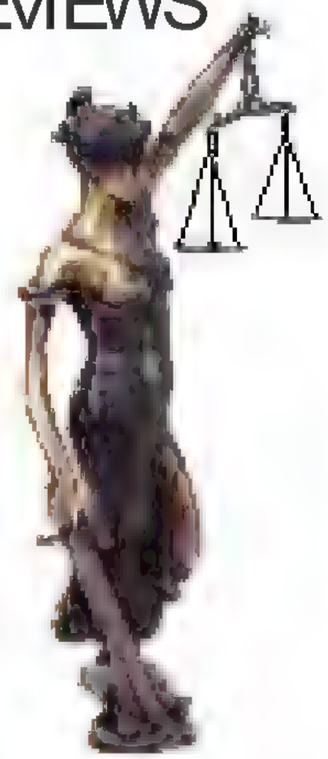
BRINGING Johnny Alpha to life in Down To Earth *is Simon Pegg, perhaps best known for the UK Channel 4 TV comedy* Spaced. *He took some time out while recording the audio to talk to Borderline's John Parkinson.*

SIMON Pegg is well known to have a fondness for 2000AD and *Strontium Dog* in particular, [in fact, there's a reference to the character's untimely demise in a second series episode of *Spaced*], and so when the part of Johnny Alpha in the audio play came up Mark Gatiss (who plays Judge Death in the second 2000AD audio, *Death Trap*, reviewed in The Verdict this issue) called Pegg to ask him if he would be interested in the role. Simon jumped at the chance. Johnny Alpha is, he says, his favourite character from 2000AD, so getting to play him is like a rite of passage, a real joy. He sees Alpha as very much a hero - honest and gallant, less ambiguous than Dredd. Pegg realised when he got the part that he'd never considered what Alpha sounded like when he spoke; he couldn't have a gruff US accent like Dredd because Alpha is most definitely English. He sees these audios as a labour of love; he expects the majority of buyers to be 2000AD fans rather than a new audience, but he hopes that if someone unfamiliar with the character picks them up they'll be able to enjoy the stories anyway.

Pegg reminisces about 2000AD being the great British comic, a training ground for writers and artists. A fan since 1987, he read 2000AD for 5 or 6 years before moving on to just the Judge Dredd Megazine then the trade paperbacks, before starting on 2000AD again after being given a free subscription. As well as Alpha, he cites the ABC Warriors, especially Joe Pineapples; Rogue Trooper; Zenith and Nemesis the Warlock as his favourite characters. He's interested in the idea of writing comics one day but at the moment all his time is taken up with his television and film work: currently he is writing the zombie movie *Shaun of the Dead* with Edgar Wright [director of *Spaced*] for Film Four, working on a new sitcom with [*Spaced* co-star] Nick Frost about a pub quiz team and also starting work on *Spaced* series three with co-creator and star Jessica Stevenson.



VERDICT COMICS REVIEWS



THIS MONTH'S JURY:

David R. Booth (DRB)
Rob Cave (RC)
Andrew Cheverton (AC)
Jay Eales (JE)
Kelvin Green (KG)
Kev Hill (KH)
Rol Hirst (RH)
Marissa Guidara (MG)
Neil McOnie (NM)
Mike Sivier (MS)
Andy Winter (AW)

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Alias #9
Marvel Max
By Brian Michael Bendis and Michael Gaydos

You can stick a fork in me, I'm done. This series isn't going anywhere or achieving anything. As a superhero story set in the Marvel Universe, it fails to create the sense of wonder such an environment should ignite, and further fails to add a gritty dimension to established characters. As a detective series, it lacks any real detecting beyond what the average person could achieve using the Internet and is still, after nine issues, failing to add anything to the unlikeable main character. For a series supposedly bridging mainstream superheroes with gritty independent comics this falls cleanly between two stools (and not necessarily the wooden kind).

The art doesn't make anything easier; unless the cast members differ greatly in age, wear glasses or sport facial hair, they all tend to blur into the same generic profile, leaving the colourist to work overtime to relieve the dead homogeneity of it all.

The covers by David Mack are beautiful, but mostly serve to keep the creator from working on Kabuki.

The Verdict: Virtually without plot or character or incident, this is failing on almost every level of mature literature, and confusing the tenets of mature readers' comics in an almost amateur fashion. Marvel should rename this line Min Comics. (AC)

Amazing Spider-Man #40
Marvel
By J Michael Straczynski and John Romita Jr

It's almost pointless trying to criticise this comic by now. JMS is The Man Who Can Do No Wrong and this example of his scripting isn't going to change anybody's mind.

Here are a few reasons why: the scenes in the Daily Bugle building between Aunt May and that "Gotta use hats made out of tinfoil" guy, and between May and Jonah; the bit where Spidey walks down a wall, deep in thought, and stops to eat popcorn with some guy standing on a fire escape.

They don't add anything to the main thrust of the story, which is about some villain who can't be touched if he doesn't want to be, spiriting children away to who-knows-where.

But they are an immeasurable bonus to the comic. It's moments like these that let the story breathe, and allow characters to become, in the minds of the readers, people.

The Verdict: It's pigswill. Utter garbage. No, really! You won't like it! You're going to buy it anyway, aren't you? (MS)

Chiaroscuro #3
Meanwhile Studios
By Troy Little

Many independent comics contain slow-burn stories that build one on the other over the course of a few issues, preferring to characterise through speech and nuance rather

Dumped
Oni Press
By Andi Watson

A sweet little romance grows between neatness-obsessed Debs and secondhand book collector Binny, until their opposing personalities begin to drive them apart. Can they wise up in time to save a relationship that's drowning, both metaphorically and literally, in thunderstorm floods? Andi Watson ensures these are characters we very quickly come to care about, so every angry word makes us ache for a happy ending.

Beyond the ups and downs of the central relationship, Watson also makes some interesting points about people and the things they throw away, avoiding cliché throughout. Yes, the characters occasionally spout Sunday supplement philosophy, but there's a real sense that they're perfectly aware of this. When Debs confesses, "I'm working towards... having less. Otherwise it owns you," we can hear her hesitation and see the doubt on her face. It's rare to find a writer with so shrewd an ear for the way people - sometimes clumsily - incorporate such things into their everyday speech patterns. As for a lesson in how to convey emotion and statement in the minimum amount of brushstrokes, artists everywhere should look at Watson's work.

While many "slice of life/relationship" books appear to be written purely for us dysfunctional geeks (step forward Alex Robinson and Adrian Tomine), it's refreshing to read one that isn't. Indeed, you could happily share Dumped with your comicbook-indifferent girlfriend or boyfriend... if you had one.

The Verdict: If the heart of a hopeless romantic beats in your chest, Andi Watson is waiting for you. (RH)

Fables #1
DC
By Bill Willingham and Lan Medina

Mix up some fairytales, a murder mystery and a bad Neil Gaiman impression, and you get Fables, another brick in the great wall of mediocre comics that seem to be Vertigo's speciality these days. Fables finds fairytale characters, booted out of their stories and into the real world, hiding in Manhattan, where Willingham tries to put a spin on folklore by predictably giving readers the opposite of the classical archetypes: Snow White is a tough bitch running "Fabletown", Beauty and the Beast seek marriage counselling, and Prince Charming has less than charming discussions about his "cocksmanship". Along with the predictability of Willingham's characterisations are his obvious jokes, the highlight being rumours of Snow White's sex-capades with the seven dwarves. Medina's art matches Willingham's writing: it's nice, but you won't be begging for more.

The entire build up of this issue leads to the disappearance of a raver version of Rose Red and the discovery of her blood-spattered apartment by Jack (of "...And The Beanstalk" fame), which isn't much of a kicker since DC heavily advertised this detail. Suckers for mysteries might be interested, since the "whodunnit meets fairyland" angle is the direction in which this first arc is headed.

From day one, Fables was subliminally hyped as being capable of filling the Gaiman niche Vertigo tries to satisfy regularly (this time

attempting to impersonate Gaiman right down to the familiar chapter titles, reminiscent of *Season Of Mists* and *Stardust*), but it fails to catch that magical spark fans will expect, let alone the edginess the imprint demands - and, in this day and age, with classic Vertigo scribes like Morrison, Milligan and Ennis pushing the envelope in the mainstream, your money is better spent elsewhere.
The Verdict: Should be put in a special section alongside the rest of the Sandman-inspired drivel that the goth kids go gaga for. (MG)

than conflict and opposition. On the surface, there's little story in them and there are only so many times one can praise good art.

This is a good comic, one of the best out there today. It's about people like us doing what we do, but with all of those witty comebacks told at the time instead of two days later, and it's told in such a way that we can learn just why other people get pissed off with us and refuse to talk to us for months. Chiaroscuro is a mirror, and we all need mirrors.
The Verdict: It's increasingly difficult to review comics that don't lend themselves to capsule comments and summary. You should buy this. That's my verdict. I can't make it much simpler. (AC)

Fantastic Four #55
Marvel
By Karl Kesel and Stuart Immonen

Plus ça change... but this is refreshing. The usual kind of childish argument between the Torch and the Thing leads to them visiting, in an effort to avoid the wrath of Sue, the Forbush warehouse for Reed, resulting in a tongue-in-cheek run-in with some guy calling himself the Skrull Grand Acquisitioner.

This light-hearted tale is a reminder that this is just a comic, and it's supposed to be fun! Kesel's sparkling dialogue ("Everyone get back! The Wizard's gonna fire his John Tesh ray...") is ably complemented by Immonen's solid art. His characters' facial expressions alone give the story a tremendous boost – look at Johnny's face on page three ("Oysters! Trust me, Franklin – they're just like snot with legs!").
The Verdict: What a shame this is just a filler issue before a new creative team comes in. A few months of this could do wonders for the battered old FF. (MS)

Green Arrow #13
DC
By Kevin Smith, Phil Hester and Ande Parks

Kevin Smith seems to have made it his mission to bring sex to super-heroes, and it's amusing to see how much DC is letting him get away with. Of course, Oliver Queen is no stranger to rumpling the sheets, being one of those lucky few costumed clowns allowed to participate in on-panel coitus before, though his past sexploits have always drawn Mature Readers labelling. The most satisfying aspect of Smith's writing here comes from his recognition of the untapped potential in having a character like Hawkman punch Ollie out for sleeping with Black Canary on their first night back together. And yet another cunnilingus reference too - is Paul Levitz even reading this book?

Slightly less satisfying is the rest of this month's story; a by-the-numbers "serial superhero killer" piece that seems designed to steer us towards another "shock" death. It's to be hoped Smith avoids the temptation - he just about got away with offing Karen Page in Daredevil, but to use the gimmick again so soon would smack of a one trick plot pony. Likewise, it's to be hoped the jokey villain will be developed beyond his Doom Patrol-gag roots before Smith slopes off to join Grant Morrison at Marvel.
The Verdict: We know Kevin Smith can write hugely enjoyable smut-spiced character comedy - but his superhero plots could do with a snatch more imagination. (RH)

Grey Sky
32 A5 pages available for £1.00 from Sean Azzopardi, 261 Edward Road, London, E17 6NU

You can tell from the story titles alone - *Dirt Fear*, *Downtime*, *Skabby World* - that Grey Sky isn't going to be a fun-packed feast of frivolity. Indeed, anyone after an uplifting comics experience full of love, light, hope and floppy-eared bunny rabbits is probably going to feel like doing themselves a mischief after trawling through the dark, grubby, disturbing worlds created here by writer/artist Sean Azzopardi. Take *Dirt Fear*, for instance, a bleak, dystopian tale of underground trains, wage slavery and the soul-crushing grind of routine. This strip demonstrates Azzopardi's talent for taking something totally ordinary - in this case travelling to work by tube - and then giving it a spiteful little twist, so that suddenly you're in a nightmarish scare-scape of filth, violence and screaming ennui. Stark black and white art, coupled with some imaginative panel layouts, crank up the oppressive atmosphere nicely.

On the surface Grey Sky's second main strip, *Downtime*, is similarly downbeat, its main protagonist Brian setting the agenda early on with the words: "I always wanted to be a famous artist. This is a tale about how I failed in the pursuit of a dream." However, there's a rich vein of dark humour running through the strip, as Azzopardi seems to revel in the way life knocks us all about and how even our most fervent dreams are likely to remain just that. There's a strong element of farce here too, as the writer turns the screw on his main characters, their lives going from bad, to worse, to pretty much

intolerable in the space of nine pages. This is clever, confident stuff, and not a million miles away from some of Dan Clowes' more misanthropic work from Eightball.

Grey Sky's final two strips are one-pagers. *The Baron* is a laugh out loud account of the titular character's attempt at ridding his abode of a rodent infestation with predictably unsavoury results, while *Skabby World* returns to what seems Azzopardi's favourite theme: the tyranny of routine.

The Verdict: Grey Sky is a straight up, no chaser drop of the dark stuff. Make mine a double. (AW)

Marvel Mangaverse #2
Marvel
By Ben Dunn and Kevin Gunstone

I do believe that this is one of the most fun comics currently available. The creative team are obviously having a great time throwing diverse aspects of Marvel history into the anarchic mix, and that shows through on every page, making this a delight to read. The Fantastic Four and the new Captain Marvel encounter Galactus, the Giant Space Virus, and find the Lava Men engaged in a ground war with the Inhumans on Galactus' surface! Meanwhile, fans of 1950s Marvel will be overjoyed to see the splendid Fin Fang Foom make a cameo appearance as one of Galactus' "spores".

It's impossible not to be affected by the creative team's obvious enthusiasm, making this a highly enjoyable title. It seems to have comfortably thrown off its gimmicky origins, to develop, by only the second issue, its own strengths. The adventure and excitement left behind (admittedly successfully in some cases) by other comics are abundant here, guaranteeing a niche and audience for this excellent title. Marvel is onto a winner here.

The Verdict: Perfect for younger fans, and pretty close to perfect for the older reader too. If you're into having fun, then look no further. (KG)

New X-Men #126
Marvel
By Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely

There are many theories about the interplay between the writing of a comic and its art, which plays the greater or the lesser part in the storytelling, and how they can intertwine in the reader's mind to produce a singular work that is neither story nor art individually, but that particular form of fiction we call a comicbook.

I don't understand any of those theories, which is probably why I'm constantly infuriated by this comic and how the previous issues in this storyline can have been such absolute calamities on all counts, yet this issue manages to pull it all together in such a satisfactory fashion. Now, I love Quitely's art, I like Van Sciver's art, but I loathe Kordey's art. But I don't buy comics for the art; I buy them for the writer. Yet, it's interesting to note that my favourite issues of Morrison's run have all been drawn by Quitely, whilst the ones I've hated are all Kordey's issues. The ones in between the two have been Van Sciver's. So, unless Morrison has, for some perverse and otherworldly reason, been adjusting his talent according to his artist, I appear to be appreciating New X-Men based on how pretty it looks. That can't be the case, because I've enjoyed the whole of Transmetropolitan despite every issue looking like shit on a bad day.

So, this issue is really very good, but that doesn't mean that I recant all of the vehement statements I made about the previous issue last month.

The Verdict: There's something going on here. It's not an X-Men comic at all; it's some nefarious magical scheme with us as the sacrificial victims. You mark my words. (AC)

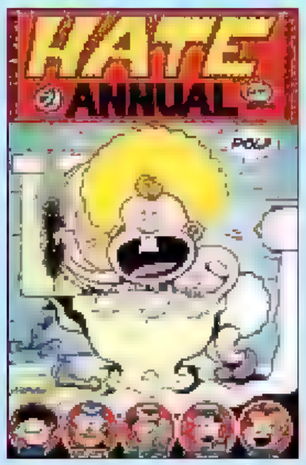
Peter Parker: Spider-Man #44
Marvel
By Paul Jenkins and Humberto Ramos

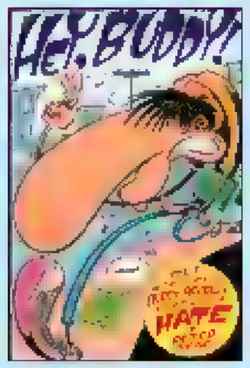
Jenkins returns to the title, not with Mark Buckingham but Humberto Ramos as the interior artist as well as providing the covers for this, a four-issue run featuring the return of the Green Goblin. Why Marvel should choose this month to have the Green Goblin in this title as well as in Ultimate Spider-Man is beyond me; maybe it's just a case of unfortunate scheduling. Or a deliberate attempt at tying everything in with a hugely successful movie.

From the outset you can see that this is going to be one of Jenkins' more psychological stories. Norman Osborn plainly has an agenda and a plan with which to ensnare the spider, and Peter is already at a low ebb, pining for the missing Mary Jane and suffering from portentous dreams. So the stage is set for a definitive battle.

Ramos' art is quite magnificent, ranging from his hyper-kinetic, balletic figures in the fight scenes to the exaggerated expressions of the manga-faced characters in the quieter moments. I haven't read a Ramos-drawn comic since Impulse and it's refreshing to reacquaint myself with such wonderful and simply enjoyable art, all of it added to immeasurably by the sublime colouring job by Studio F, whose work blurs the boundary where inking finishes and colouring begins,

Hate Annual #2
Fantagraphics
By Peter Bagge





Four years after the end of the original ongoing series, Bagge again returns to the life of the late 20something slacker Buddy Bradley, now settled down with his child and long-time/sometimes girlfriend, Lisa.

The main strip, like much of Hate itself, has a car-crash like quality as we see Buddy stuck babysitting his niece and nephew as well as looking after his own kid while his girlfriend and sister are out enjoying themselves. There is no way on earth Buddy is going to get to just watch the TV like he wants, trouble awaits...

Bagge knows his creation so well he could write Buddy in his sleep. Unfortunately, you get the impression he actually might start doing this... stories about an ex-slacker stuck in the rut of fatherhood get old and boring very quickly. That said, just like the latter part of Hate's original series, the adventures of Buddy Bradley only take up part of the book, the rest being given over to some illustrated journalism and a far funnier strip featuring another of Bagge's creations, Lovey, and her girlfriends. The articles, two written and illustrated by Bagge, are very patchy but interesting enough and show that Bagge really wants to be moving his comics output in the direction of a strips and articles based 'zine like Shannon Wheeler's Toomuchcoffeeman - not a bad thing at all. But for me the highlight is the *Lovey* strip that is not so much *Sex and the City* with its annoying rich girls as "sex in the suburbs". It's a strip that not only demonstrates Bagge's love of all things pop, but is also funny.

The Verdict: An enjoyable comic that is a better introduction to Peter Bagge's continually developing work than it is to the Buddy Bradley character. (RC)

providing a flawless look that simply pops the art from the page.

I do, however, wish Marvel would reinstate the final page's "Next Issue" boxes at the end of each issue; there's nothing more anticlimactic than missing the creators' intended ending - whether subtle or cliffhanging - because you've no way of knowing it was there until you've missed it.

The Verdict: It's Spidey versus the Green Goblin, with all of the baggage each would bring to a grudge match, and it looks absolutely fantastic. (AC)

Popbot #2
Idea + Design Works
By Ashley Wood and Sam Kieth

I should have been wary when this issue credited Wood with story and art, and Kieth as "warden". I'm not sure what a comic warden does, but it doesn't appear to entail being involved with the writing to any extent that the reader can appreciate. However, this issue does contain a guest appearance from The Maxx as well as Julie's great granddaughter Cindy, if that sways you.

It looks very pretty, if a little over reliant on naked ladies, and the writing could do with having the language pruned, as swearing to this extent is almost embarrassingly childish.

The Verdict: Nowhere near as fresh and insane as the previous issue, essentially a pin up book in search of meaning. A bit crap, in all honesty. (AC)

Shot Callerz #1
Oni Press
By Gary Phillips and Brett Weldele

You have to respect Oni Press; they certainly keep on the cutting edge of the market. While Marvel think it's clever to poach talent from the indie publishers, Oni just keeps finding more talent to create their comics, and this time it's crime novelist Gary Phillips. I haven't read any of his books, but he's a solid comics scripter.

Unfortunately, all crime comics divide into two camps: the hip dialogue/streetwise attitude of Rucka, Azzarello and Bendis; and the quieter mode of Stray Bullets, carving its own way in the market. (I haven't mentioned Sin City, because it's more a superhero comic than a crime comic.)

Phillips lands squarely in the first camp, inviting comparison with Oni stablemate Rucka in particular, due to his use of a female protagonist betrayed and left for dead by her fellow criminals. Despite this, the characters and plot all come alive and there is a lot of dense story in just this one issue. Countering the unoriginality of the plot, Weldele's distinctive art is very atmospheric, his scratchy, emotive ink work augmented by an ink wash that is almost like sepia in its effect.

The Verdict: A familiar story made readable by strong plotting and an art style that is expressive and attractive. (AC)

Sinmakers #2-3
(20 A5 pages available for 70p from www.smallzone.co.uk)

Writer/artist Shane Rivett's statement of intent on page two tells you pretty much everything you need to know about this most audacious of British small press titles: "I have dispensed with all the inks, computer ballooning and editing and done something that comes straight out of my mind on to paper and to the reader. Sinmakers isn't pro, it isn't neat, it isn't perfect." Rivett's stream-of-consciousness approach to his work (he refers to Sinmakers as a 'live comic') makes for myriad confusing plot lines, genuinely terrible lettering and a vast and baffling array of characters. But none of that stuff is really the point here, as what he offers is a powerful antidote to the anodyne nature of many currently published comics, be they professional or amateur.

Rivett's a spiky punk rock 7" single kicking against a comics industry equivalent of progressive rock, full of pretentious concepts, fake rebellion and amateur creators so desperate to go professional they've left their balls, brains and spines behind long ago. Rough and ready? Yeah. An exciting, roller coaster read that will have you, by turns, scratching your head in bafflement, surprise and outrage? Too bloody right.

The only person who knows what Sinmakers is actually about is probably Rivett himself. Suffice to say, it's a heady melange of super-powered psychics, graphic sex, lost childhoods and religious angst. And you *really* have to see the cover to Issue Three to believe it.

The Verdict: Never mind the bollocks... here's Shane Rivett (AW)

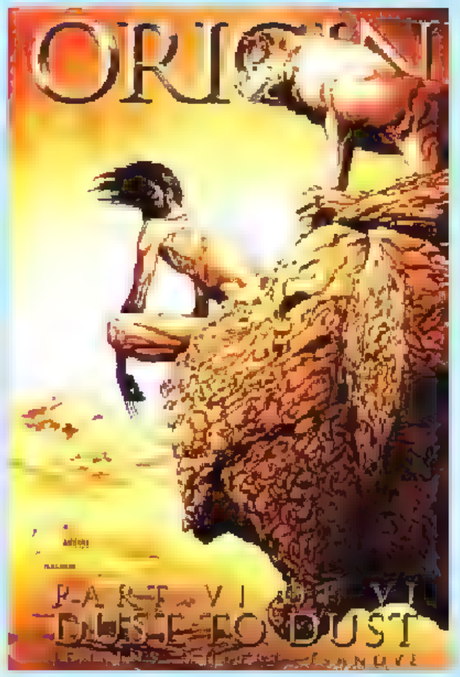
Slow News Day #6
Slave Labor
By Andi Watson

Andi Watson creates comics of small-scale drama, personal relationships and intimate moments; if he were a novelist or filmmaker, he'd be well respected and world-famous by now. Only in comics would his resolutely mainstream offerings be seen as avant-garde and marginal. Maybe that says more about the average superhero fan's

Origin #6
Marvel
By Paul Jenkins and Andy Kubert

It's been two long months since we last caught a glimpse of Wolverine's pre-Weapon X adventures in Origin. Surely there must have been a valid reason for the delay. Marvel must have just been planning a grand finale for the last issue of this controversial series... So what exactly happened?

Maybe it took longer than expected for Joe Quesada to complete his tacky "magic eye illusion" cover where, if you stare at it long enough, the rock formation an emaciated-looking Logan is sitting on begins taking the shape of a masked and screaming Wolverine. It almost makes me miss the days of chromium covers.



Or maybe it was the interior pencils. Certainly nobody wanted to rush Andy Kubert in his endeavour of exaggerating facial expressions horribly and botching up any sense of real movement. And, for whatever reason, in too many panels Logan looks like a young Jim Belushi.

The hold-up might have been the extensive planning required for the incredibly un-inventive climax where Logan accidentally stabs a lady friend in the chest, straight through to the other side, *a la* Hugh Jackman (hell, there's even a cage match in this issue). And to think it took the brainpower of Quesada, Jemas, and Jenkins all working together to plot this one out.

At this point, James finally resembles a full-grown Logan, but it's not believable that he'll grow up to be the Wolverine we all love. The most interesting aspect of Origin is that it seems to be a floating story, one that's by itself. This isn't a story that Wolverine is aware of. The readers now know everything he's struggled with for years, yet he does not. Which might be a good thing, because even Wolverine would be disappointed by it.

The Verdict: "The greatest story never told"? Good, let's all pretend this never happened. (MG)

unfamiliarity with Watson's subject matter than about Watson himself.

Slow News Day has been what all Watson fans would expect: sad and funny, obvious and true, annoying and reassuring all at once. You can't criticise a work for that, because it's how the world works every day; Watson just puts it onto paper.

His art has almost streamlined itself into abstract expressionism, retaining just enough to convince of its realism, almost like a distilled essence of the characters, as they are conveyed in almost caricatured versions. How many other artists can draw a convincing, identifiable car in just nine pen strokes?

The Verdict: A comics series about people; more likely and affecting than a soap opera, less sentimental and contrived than a Hollywood romantic comedy. (AC)

Spawn #116
Image/TMP
By Brian Holguin
and Angel Medina

Spawn accepts the consequences of his taking on Malebolgia's power by launching a cockeyed plan to merge Hell with Earth in order to make a new Eden.

Meanwhile, a new creature arises in a weirdly insectoid way, presumably to menace the main man.

Quite a plot-heavy issue, this, what with Cogliostro telling Spawn he's dying, Spawn's decision, Cog's vow to help him (crazy old coot) and the creation of the new character - but it feels like it's only a prologue to the real story.

The Verdict: Watching this play out might be like viewing a train crash in slow motion. If you like that sort of thing, this is recommended. If not: Avoid. (MS)

Spider-Man's Tangled Web #13
Marvel
By Ron Zimmerman
and Sean Phillips

A group of villains hang out in a seedy bar, swapping Spidey stories and generally poking fun at each other. Ron Zimmerman does a nice line in barroom chat, and it's always good to see supervillains break away from their standard robbing / killing / taking-over-the-world patterns and given the chance to behave like real people.

Marvel purists might object to the portrayal of the three central bad guys, but, let's face it, Norman Osborn was turned into a complete nutball by Byrne and Mackie, so anything's going to be a step up from that (and his final monologue here does manage to cause a shiver). Zimmerman's portrayal of Kraven Jr. shows most promise, finally moving the character out of his father's shadow and boding well for the forthcoming Get Kraven! miniseries. Only the Vulture loses dignity, treated like too much of a joke considering his dark and violent past. Sean Phillips contributes a grubby backroom art job, though he always seems a little wasted drawing superheroes.

The Verdict: *Cheers* with costumed psychos – amusing, if inconsequential, though Zimmerman shows promise. (RH)

Daemonifuge 1-3
The Black Library
By Jim Campbell
and Kev Walker

I used to play *Warhammer*. *Warhammer 40,000* it was - the futuristic one. Little lead figures and dice and all that. You know what I mean.

Warhammer 40,000 - a brief summary. There's this Emperor, right, and he's nearly dead, but not quite. He's very psychic, and can spot bad things like Chaos a mile away. Chaos, and the forces thereof, is demon chaps and weird aliens with horns and people and the whole thing is very evil. Fighting against the incursions of Chaos for the Emperor (for they would have the galaxy for their own) are the Space Marines. They're kind of like Roman legionnaires only with massive armour and massive guns. They look good, but they're a bit lacking in humour. There are Chaos Space Marines as well. They've got big armour and guns too, but some of them have horns and they're all a bit infected and snotty. I never wanted to be them.

Why the summary? Well, without it, Daemonifuge: The Screaming Cage probably wouldn't make a lot of sense. Produced by The Black Library, the comic arm of Nottingham's Games Workshop, this three-issue mini-series is set in the dense and imaginative *Warhammer 40,000* universe. As a result, much of the action in Daemonifuge demands at least a passing acquaintance with it. Also, if I tried to explain it all as I go along, this review would fall apart before we really got anywhere. You'll see.

Daemonifuge follows the adventures of one Ephrael Stern, a warrior-nun of the Adepta Sororitas chapter of Space Marines. Stern has been returned to her convent after disappearing MIA with no memory of how she came to disappear. The series opens with the arrival of Inquisitor Silas Hand, a member of the Emperor's Inquisition. He's a big, mad religious zealot with huge guns and some nasty facial scarring. Hand has come to the convent to test Stern to see if she has been seduced into the ways of Chaos - all very Torquemada. The series follows the two as they seek to uncover the mystery of Stern's disappearance and reappearance.

This is an interesting yarn with a surprising and intriguing denouement, but the story fails to really engage with the reader. Although rich and detailed, the *Warhammer 40,000* universe is a restrictive thing when it comes to fiction. Both of the leads are interesting characters, especially the fanatical Hand, but neither really develops beyond their existence as soldiers in the Emperor's war against Chaos. There's a lack of emotional connection between the two, a factor exacerbated by the stilted, hyperbolic style of speech used by all of the characters (and indeed used by the characters of any fictional *Warhammer 40,000* piece I can remember reading).

On the plus side, the artwork in Daemonifuge is tremendous. Kev Walker's dense, detailed pages expertly convey the stifling, overcrowded universe of *Warhammer 40,000*. Presented in glorious, textured greyscale, Walker's art shares the lush, expansive quality of Jim Starlin's early Dreadstar (see the Eclipse graphic novel, The Price). Simply breathtaking: this chap is a talent.

The Verdict: Overall, this is one for the fans of *Warhammer*, which is unfortunate. Set outside of the confines of this structured universe, this could have been an excellent book. All of the negatives are a result of its setting: the lack of characterisation, the awful speech and the fact that it is in places incomprehensible to the casual reader unfamiliar with *Warhammer*. The plusses - an intriguing story, the beautiful, beautiful artwork - stem from a creative team who might do well to find their own universe to play in, instead of hanging around somebody else's. (NM)

Spider-Man: Blue #1
Marvel Knights
By Jeph Loeb & Tim Sale

Just so you know: I love everything that Loeb and Sale have ever worked on together; Spider-Man is my favourite hero of all time; the Lee/Ditko/Romita era will always be my favourite; and I adored Gwen Stacy so much when I was young I've named my daughter after her. If you want an entirely balanced and unbiased review, you're shit out of luck. It's just like reading *Wizard*, isn't it?

Set during Peter Parker's college years, this has all the classic elements from that more innocent, unsullied time. As Daredevil: Yellow used the early years to show Matt Murdock's loss of Karen Page, this series intends to write the love story between Peter and Gwen and, ultimately, Mary Jane. A character whose sense of responsibility was precipitated by the death of his Uncle Ben, Spider-Man has always seemed equally haunted by the death of Gwen Stacy, the girl he loved and couldn't save. As Uncle Ben died through a flaw in Peter's character, Gwen died through a flaw in judgement, and this has always seemed to me to be the deeper cut. And an intense, retrospective version of that love story should, like Daredevil: Yellow before it, offer a fresh interpretation of the hero through his personal trials and tribulations rather than his superheroic exploits.

The Verdict: Written with insight through the lens of nostalgia, and drawn beautifully (yet with eerie similarity to Romita) by Sale, this is a work that would appeal to all Spider-Fans, old and new. But the old buggers will love it. (AC)

Tower
Sirius
By Sean McKeever and Jason Alexander

There is quite simply more story (actual and metaphorical) in this one issue than most comics could manage in their entire runs. By turns reminiscent of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* and Stephen King's Dark Tower, it manages to retain its own identity through sharp, insightful writing and creative, detailed artwork.

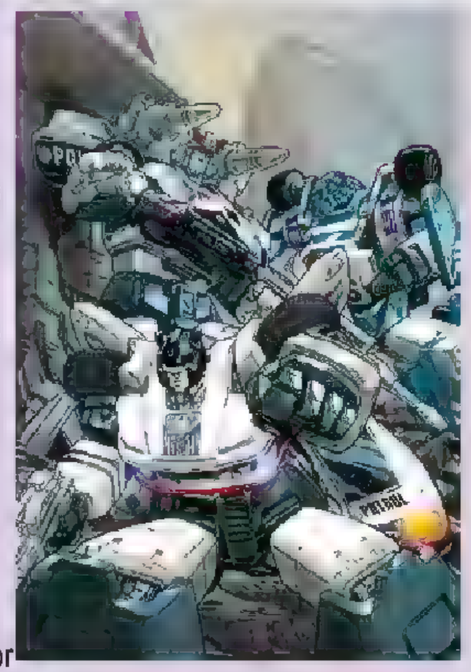
A security guard relieves the monotony of his job by pondering the mystery of the Tower, a huge stone spire that sits mysteriously at the centre of the future city in which he lives. What is its secret and what does it mean to him, should he manage to scale its sheer walls?

This is an ambitious work for a one-shot but its creators seem to mesh perfectly. McKeever's script moves leanly along in the present and the past, filling in information largely through character dialogue, but also in silent panels that speak volumes through simple detail and body language. Alexander's art is crisp and renders the SF environments entirely believable, helped by reproduction that picks out all of the nuances of his inking as well as the smudges and the soft pencil work. Black and white comics rarely look as good as this, and very few comics read as well as this.

The Verdict: This is an adult SF tale without profanity, sex and violence, and ambiguous enough to return to time and again. (AC)

Publishers – send your comics and trades to BORDERLINE, 45 Fullingdale Road, Northampton, NN3 2PZ England

Transformers: Generation One #2
Dreamwave
By Chris Sarracini and Pat Lee



Last month, I said I wasn't sure what I thought of this title. I am now. This comic has finally revealed itself as somewhat disappointing and little more than an indulgence in nostalgia. The art remains pretty but leaves me cold, because there is no life in these pictures. The humans seem just as mechanical as the titular robots. As if that wasn't bad enough, the art team have somehow managed to mess up their interpretation of Optimus Prime. Considering that he is one of the major characters, it seems that they should have put more effort into his redesign, instead of delivering the clumsy and strange-looking lump we see here. That said, the artists partly redeem themselves with an excellent portrayal of an attack on a mining outpost by terrorist-controlled Transformers. The portrayal of Grimlock is suitably bulky, and it's great fun to see perennial weakling Bumblebee engage in wanton destruction.

Although the lettering is adequate, long-time Transformers readers, or even those who have read the recent Titan collections, may be confused by the way that the lettering team have decided not to show the unique speech of the Transformers, abandoning the former practice of using some kind of font or bubble effect to show this.

The greatest disappointment, however, is the writing. Very little happens in this comic, and what does happen results from arbitrary plot developments. The dialogue is a little off, too. Although the military general from last issue doesn't get to spout any clichés this time around, the Transformers themselves get to speak in rather uncharacteristic ways. This being a re-launch, Dreamwave is obviously not tied to previous characterisations, but as this series is only six issues long, there won't be enough room to recreate the characters afresh, so the writer should really be basing the characters on their previous incarnations, at least to a point. Megatron fares well, with a top-notch speech about why he hates humanity, but then writer Chris Sarracini fouls it up by having the psychotic warlord talk about having some fun.

I really do want to like this, but I find it difficult to do so. The visuals are nice, but the writing has rendered my favourite characters unrecognisable. Worse, this series is two issues into its six-issue run, and the amount of actual plot covered is equivalent to an issue #0 preview. I hope to be proved wrong as it continues, but at this stage, I'm not confident.

The Verdict: A lot of people like this, but the ineffective writing has left me feeling disappointed. (KG)

Fade from Blue #1
Second2Some Studios
By Myatt Murphy and Scott Dalrymple

I can't shake the feeling of déjà vu.

I also can't quite work out from this first issue whether or not I think this is going to work. The premise is this: four half sisters, all with different mothers, have the same polygamist father – who just happens to be a spy or has some kind of link to espionage.

The girls (Iya, a former Soviet bloc topless model; Marit, a butch city cop; Elisa, a semi-successful nightclub singer and Christa, who appears to be some kind of computer nerd with all the nerd tendencies you'd normally associate with a man) are introduced in a series of scenarios best designed to give you maximum knowledge in a small space, of course leaving just enough blanks to keep potential new readers interested.

The thing is, I have truly mixed feelings about this comic because, without being anything particularly innovative, it's doing more for the industry than anything else from either the independent or mainstream USA. Forget your DC 10 cent adventures or your nine cent Fantastic Four, this is something that really deserves to be highlighted because it's the first issue of a new series and - it costs just one dollar! And next month, when the second issue comes out that will be $1.50, and it's staying at that price for the first story arc at least. With a bit of hard work, luck and tenacity, these guys should have established Fade From Blue by that time!

So why the feeling of déjà vu? I keep looking at Dalrymple's artwork and feeling I've seen it some place before. One thing is for sure, he's a competent artist with a bright future ahead of him, on this showing. There's a degree of pacing you don't expect to see from a newcomer, a use of angles that suggests a far more experienced sequential artist and an ability to tell a story in pictures without heavy-handed inkers or computer colourists.

But... the déjà vu might also be there because it feels a little like it could be this year's Strangers In Paradise. Myatt Murphy is a man and, ultimately, this could be a stumbling block. Because while Terry Moore or Chris Claremont are regarded as writers of good strong female characters, both of them also come in for a lot of criticism for being anything but good writers of good female characters. Do you understand? For every person who applauds males writing strong female characters, there's someone else (probably a woman) pulling their hair out and screaming at the dialogue. I'm not a woman and find conversations between them something of a mystery so I don't know if this reflects what really happens when a group of girls - sisters - gets together. But of course, this is comicbooks, so is it really worth wondering about the authenticity?

One interesting thing about this comic is that it really is a move closer to the action/adventure film format. Or is it the other way round? Could the writers be seeing the potential in a film or TV series, so they've grounded the intellectual copyright with a comics series? Either way it means that new writers and artists are developing a storytelling ability that the last generation of creators didn't have and, if the industry becomes even more fragmented, this kind of comics experiment will be the successful one, not the likes of a Spider-Man or Justice League miniseries.

The Verdict: The ramifications of the price of this comic alone could have major effects - the fact that it is so cheap should encourage you to go and seek it out, because it isn't a bad comic and has bags of potential. It's worth more than a dollar. (DRB)

VERDICT MANGA

Chobits Vol. 1
Tokyopop
By Clamp

It would have been very easy for Clamp to follow the standard formula for this kind of story, and make their male lead - Hideki Motosuwa - just another pervert in the list of manga perverts, but he's actually kind of chivalrous. This innovative sci-fi begins with Hideki finding a persocom – a personal computer, but in this world computers are humanoid in shape. Hideki names his persocom Chi, after the only word she can initially say when he boots her up, but is intrigued as to where she comes from, enlisting the help of a friend in his search for information on Chi's origins. Clamp have managed to craft a delightful tale, and have avoided producing another dull "boy has unusual girl to look after" story - something relatively common in manga.
The Verdict: Lovely in many ways, Clamp have done it again. (KH)

Dragon Knights Vol. 1
Tokyopop
By Mineko Ohkami

"What happens when an elfin prince, a Yokai demon-warrior and a human thief are thrown together on an epic quest?" says the blurb on the back of this volume - a release that is part of Tokyopop's "100% Authentic" line. The answer is... not much. Not much at all. There's a bit of violence, some magic, some vague attempts at humour – or, more likely, humour that doesn't translate well - and, let's not forget, some cross-dressing. With its pointy-toothed smiling pretty boys, who happen to look near identical to all the girls of the book, it's difficult to like it. The art is sparse, and harks back to the work of Johji Manabe, whose stories were far more interesting on the whole.
The Verdict: Worth the price of admission? No, unless your humour is dry as a bone. (KH)

GTO – Great Teacher Onizuka 1
Tokyopop
By Tohru Fujisawa

Eikichi Onizuka has decided to become a teacher. His motives are dubious, and mostly relate to high school girls, but his conviction is amazing. In this first volume we discover our protagonist listless and jobless, his reason for becoming a teacher, and the beginning of his struggle to become known as Great Teacher Onizuka. It doesn't start off

Akira Vol. 6
Dark Horse/Titan Books
By Katsuhiro Otomo

How do you go about reviewing Akira? Like Watchmen, The Dark Knight Returns or Maus, it's an acknowledged classic of the medium and defies the attempts of oiks like myself to review it meaningfully. Still, in the spirit of blindly rushing in I'll have a go at it.

It is acknowledged as a classic for a reason, and that reason is that it really is very good indeed. It's not perfect, but we'll get to the flaws later. For now let's bask in its greatness. First off, the art is superb. The style is clean, with subtle shading and a deceptively simple, animation-like appearance. The cartoonesque style might mean that there is a lack of detail, but in fact there is a great deal of detail hidden in the panels that rewards the keen-sighted. The art is highly expressive, successfully conveying humour at some points, as well as less cuddly emotions elsewhere. Action sequences are done very well, and the storytelling is very good indeed, with the visuals being quite easy to follow. The Western and Eastern styles of storytelling are quite different (see Scott McCloud's Understanding Comics for details) and as a result it is often difficult for a comics reader used to one style to successfully comprehend the other. It is unusual, but very pleasing that Akira is so easily followed in these English editions.

The writing is fairly sparse, making this a surprisingly quick read for all of its 435 pages. That said, it suits the rapid pace of this sixth and last volume of the epic, as it is full of action scenes. There's a wonderfully helpful "Story so far..." recap at the start of this volume, which serves well enough to allow the reader to make sense of the book, although I guarantee that anyone who reads this alone will read the rest in short order. The events of this volume are a suitable climax to the epic series, ostensibly being a large-scale destruction fest in the Authority style (no offence to Messrs Hitch, Quitely et al, but this blows their work away). This highlights what is for me the best aspect of the volume, and the work in general, and that is the way that it works on so many levels. As noted, fans of Authority-scale superheroics will enjoy the audacity of the super powered action on show here, but there are many other delights to be enjoyed. There's good character development which at first glance would appear to be a superficial "let's all be friends" approach but is far deeper and more interesting than that. Likewise, the grand explosive climax is nicely coupled with a philosophical-biological-evolutionary journey for one of our heroes.

This depth makes it very difficult to say what Akira is actually about; for example, in this volume alone Otomo deals with such diverse subjects as drug abuse, American foreign policy, post-WWII Japan, the nature of friendship, the nature of dependence, the torments of adolescence, the nature of humanity and the nature of the universe itself. All this and more is woven around a grand orgy of destruction straight out of that ultimate action movie that exists only in your imagination. As noted above, all these subjects slip seamlessly and subtly into the work as a whole, rewarding the careful reader without confusing the casual browser, and this is the work's greatest achievement. If nothing else, it'll give you something to talk about.

A work of such epic scale cannot be flawless, however, and this is true of Akira too. Although this volume is the large-scale equivalent of the punch-up at the end of an action movie, and is quite fitting in that capacity, some readers may be disappointed by the fact that it is essentially 435 pages of people hitting each other. That said, if you've read the previous five volumes (or the handy recap), you'll find this to be a perfect ending to the saga. Read as a standalone book it's less satisfying, but still well worth reading.

The book's main problem is that it is a little repetitive - the characters rush between the same small number of locations again and again, and the orbital lasers are an overused plot device. It is only with hindsight that this flaw is noticeable, however, as the sheer scope and pace of the book keeps the reader distracted from what is, compared to the title's strengths, only a minor flaw.
The Verdict: It's not without its flaws, but they're understandable in a work this big. Read it. Read it now. And the other five volumes, too. This is truly essential. (KG)

too well, with him coming up against his pupils, and them managing to blackmail him. But he gets his revenge, and most definitely their respect, thanks to his past as a gang member and karate champ. But he also discovers that things aren't quite so easy for his pupils, and he realises that to be a great teacher he needs to go that bit further to succeed.
The Verdict: A mad snapshot of a Japanese high school's life and its new – and weird – teacher. Very entertaining. (KH)

Initial D Vol. 1
Tokyopop
By Shuichi Shigeno

This doesn't belong here. This book belongs in the pages of *Max Power*, or some other high-performance car magazine. It's for boy racers, a category which, let's be honest, isn't likely to be one you can apply to many involved in comics fandom. If you are one of the few who have bought all the *Gran Turismo* games for your Sony machines, just so you can obsess over what motors you've collected, or if you sit mouth gaping as a Japanese motor car glides past you, or if you like watching *The Fast And The Furious* over and over again, then this comic's for you.

It's about one boy racer in particular. Set around a mountain with a course popular with the young local car fanatics, Initial D follows the life of a tofu delivery boy, who just happens to be the hottest thing on four wheels, but, to his friends at least, is just another high school kid. This volume works well at setting the scene, introducing us to average teenager Takumi Fujiwara, the local street racers, and the unusual star of the series: a Toyota Trueno 86.
The Verdict: If you like motor cars, and enjoyed *The Fast And The Furious*, you'll really like this. (KH)

Mars Vol. 1
Tokyopop
By Fuyumi Soryo

There aren't enough romance comics around nowadays, and Mars highlights this fact quite well. Kira is a shy student, with few - if any - friends, but is content with her art. Rei is her exact opposite, he's liked by all, an extrovert, and a danger-loving motorcycle racer. The two of them couldn't be farther apart, but somehow they make friends, and that's when things become interesting. As with many other romance mangas - such as Peach Girl - Mars delights in the handling of the supporting cast, with this first volume introducing the brutal girls who lust after Rei and bully Kira because of her burgeoning relationship with him, and Rei's friend Tatsuya, who has liked Kira for many years.

There are another 14 volumes of this to go, and by the end of this one you want to know what's going to happen to Kira and Rei, and how Tatsuya will be affected.
The Verdict: A charming, and graciously inexpensive, romantic drama that contains more layers than you might think. (KH)

No.5
Viz Communications
By Taiyo Matsumoto

Published as part of Viz Comics' Pulp imprint, No.5 sees the return of Black & White creator Matsumoto with a graphic novel - for want of a better term.

Visually No.5 differs from Viz Comics' previous Matsumoto series: gone are the clean lines, replaced with a sketchier style, but retaining the unique look of his characters and their world, with the addition of some stunning colour pages - something rare in a Viz series release.

The story is both simple and unusual, matching Matsumoto's art, as we follow the eponymous No.5 running from the Rainbow Council, of which he was a member. In tow is the mysterious woman Matroshka, who appears to be both kidnapped and cared for by No.5. Matsumoto has created an interesting world, and peopled it with characters who can quite easily be described as unique. As the book goes on we learn more about No.5 and his relationship with the Council, and more of the Council itself – but not too much, and not too quickly. Matsumoto knows how to ease the secrets out.
The Verdict: An oddity in the world of manga, reading more like a European comic series, but interesting and crazy enough to be worth checking out. (KH)

Planet Ladder Vol. 1
Tokyopop
By Yuri Narushima

Is the manga market ready for another "schoolgirl in a strange land" story? Tokyopop seems to think so. It's hard to see why, particularly with this story, which meanders along for the entire length of this (admittedly inexpensive) 200+ page book. There is action, there is violence, but there's just too much mystery for the story's own good. Yes, it's the first volume, but even so the clues as to what is going on are few and far between, something that isn't helped by the often confusing layout of the artwork, which will prove a detriment to anyone who isn't used to reading stories from right to left.
The Verdict: If you're unsure whether to buy this book, then don't - the best thing about it is its price. (KH)

Real Bout High School Vol. 1
Tokyopop
By Reiji Saiga and Sora Inoue

This is brash, stupid, and utterly entertaining. Oh, and it's cheap, too, being part of Tokyopop's adorably cute "100% Authentic" line. At its most basic, Real Bout is a riff on Ranma 1/2, but with the entire school participating in acts of martial art violence, and the Principal being the primary sponsor. All disagreements at Daimon High, whether between pupils and/or teachers, are settled with a martial arts contest, with anyone being able to make a challenge. This first book acts as a perfect opener, introducing the tournaments, the school, and the bizarre Principal and staff - not to mention the two main characters,

samurai sword-wielding schoolgirl Ryoko Mitsurugi, and the often stupid "ruffian", Shizuma Kusanagi. While all this is going on, somehow there still seems to be a normal student-based story going on amidst all the chaos, comedy and drama.
The Verdict: A good beginning to a fun story, and definitely worth a look. (KH)

Vagabond Vol. 1
Viz Comics
By Takehiko Inoue
When I first read the Viz comic book release of Vagabond, I was stunned to see that not only had they kept the right-to-left format, but they'd also published the original colour pages in colour. Thankfully, in collecting the first two and a half issues, they have retained the format of the comic books.

The story is that of Miyamoto Musashi, a famous Japanese swordsman and pioneer of the Niten Ichi sword style. Inoue's clean style, mixed with the colour pages, provides a beautifully rendered Japan in which the story takes place. If anything his art is reminiscent of Paul Pope, only substantially cleaner in line. This doesn't prevent him from showing a grubby world, full of real violence and hatred, as Musashi - in this book currently known as Shinmen Takezo -and his friend Matahachi survive a battle and attempt to return home. Also of note is Viz's decision to include a glossary and background information, further highlighting Vagabond's position in Japanese history.
The Verdict: Beautiful to look at, and an absorbing read, a fine addition to anyone's collection. (KH)

VERDICT COLLECTED EDITION

Batman: Nine Lives
DC
By Dean Motter & Michael Lark

Another Batman *Elseworlds* book? Ah, but this one's different - and very classy too! Dean Motter plays Gotham City as true film noir, drawing the rogues' gallery back to its gangster roots while recasting Dick Grayson as a down-at-heel private eye and Bruce Wayne as a far less benevolent millionaire than we're used to. Closer in tone to Dashiell Hammett than Raymond Chandler, this is a world where everyone has something to hide - and they may all be willing to kill for it.

By not wasting time on the too-familiar origin story, Motter is free to draft an exciting murder mystery. Both Wayne and Grayson are investigating the death of wanton nightclub owner Selina Kyle (surely an Eartha Kitt tribute); both Wayne and Grayson are high on the list of suspects. Most of the villains are just as familiar without their gimmicks and visuals - Harvey Dent is still a two-faced lawyer, Jack "the Joker" a psychotic card shark, and Oswald Cobblepot hardly needs birdie henchmen to be a Penguin. The only true comicbook element is the vigilante Batman himself... though Motter effectively justifies his inclusion, playing on the division between Wayne and his alter ego.

Michael Lark develops the gritty style he used in Vertigo's Scene Of The Crime miniseries, but turns down the lights even further, while Matt Hollingsworth's limited palette colouring and the pitch-black page borders increase the cinematic effect. There's a strong sense of period in the backgrounds and scenery, plus visual references aplenty - from *The Big Sleep* to *Chinatown* (Grayson's nose).

As for production values, Nine Lives is a beautiful book - hardback, with a shiny laminate-effect cover and glossy interiors, while the landscape format is more than just a gimmick, really adding to the flow of the story. Such luxury doesn't come cheap - but at least you can see where your money's going for a change.
The Verdict: A "must read" for fans of film noir or '40s detective fiction, this might be a little pricey for more casual readers. (RH)

Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Oz
Dark Horse/Titan
By Christopher Golden and Logan Lubera

For *Buffy* fans wondering what happened to Oz on his quest to control the beast within, here's your answer - demons, romance and a little bit of Zen, written by regular Buffy novelist Christopher Golden. You can't help but wonder how Golden got this gig, since he always fails to capture the most appealing aspect of the TV show – the quirky, amusing dialogue. A flashback featuring extracts from the script to Season Two episode *Phases* only drives that fact home - it's by far the most interesting dialogue in the book.

Still, it's good to see Oz again, even if his amusingly taciturn nature has to take something of a backseat once the spotlight is on him. But as usual in a Buffy comic, they try to make up for the lack of appealing actors and sparky dialogue by upping the sfx budget (monsters are a lot cheaper on paper). At least this time they've brought in John Totleben to design the beasties.

Logan Lubera is a promising find, too, bringing a Mike Wieringo-ish flair to the art.
The Verdict: Nice to look at, and an interesting gap filler for fans, but Dark Horse needs to work on the dialogue if it's to capture the true *Buffy* magic in comics. (RH)

Caricature
Fantagraphics
By Dan Clowes
Now Clowes is enjoying a fresh prominence thanks to the critical success of *Ghost World*, the film version of his graphic novel, Fantagraphics brings out this, the latest collection of stories from his irregular comic Eightball.

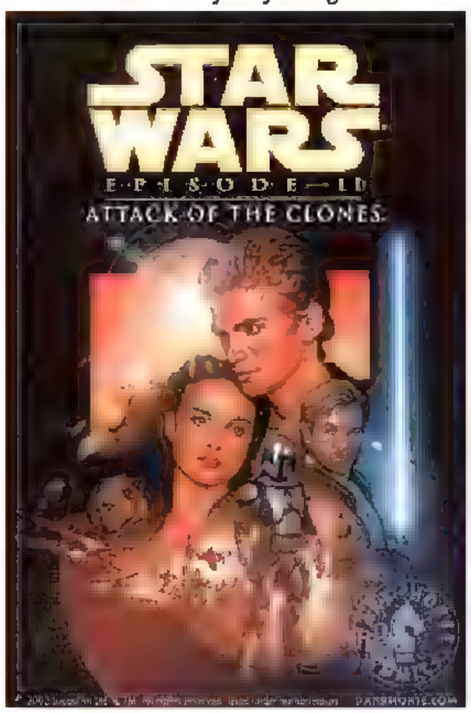
Unlike most of his previous graphic novels this doesn't just offer a single tale, but a number of shorter stories. Taking its name from the first story in the collection, Caricature is perhaps an apt title for such a series of detailed sketches of other people's lives, but doesn't really do justice to characters who are so well formed that they almost draw themselves. Their lives are seldom happy or even pretty, with each desire never quite realised and each ambition only partially met, but nor are these random cavalcades of depression.

Every line in these sketches has meaning, every line is attempting to go somewhere even if the place it ends up isn't anything more than another motel in the next state in the hope of making a few more bucks.

The form the artwork takes varies subtly, giving each story its own distinct "feel" without actively intruding onto the detail of any of the sketches. The art also veers from black and white to colour and back again between stories to great effect, most

strikingly in *Green Eyeliner*, a sketch all about surfaces and stardom, before attempting to delve deeper in the black and white *Gynecology*.
The Verdict. This is a great chance for fans new to Clowes' work to check out some of his shorter stories, which are just as well crafted, if perhaps a little less fulfilling, than his longer works. (RC)

Star Wars: Episode II - Attack Of The Clones
Dark Horse/Titan
By Henry Gilroy, Jan Duursema and Ray Kryssing



I'm not here to review the film. You've already made up your own mind about that. If the lavish set pieces and made-for-Playstation action sequences distracted you from the insipid plot, MDF acting and Harrison-Ford-was-right dialogue, then what you really want to know is - does the adaptation measure up?
Visuals first then, since this is where the movie undoubtedly succeeds - and expecting Jan Duursema to capture even a fraction of Lucas' sweeping, multi-million dollar CGI panoramas is probably asking for the impossible. Instead she wisely concentrates on capturing the characters, managing strong likenesses of the main actors, though as is often the case with this kind of photo-realism the poses tend to look rather stiff... then again, how apt.
As for the writing, while there is little Henry Gilroy can do to save the dialogue he does do a damn good job of trying to distract us with an abundance of unnecessary and unimaginative adjectives in the expository text. So Zam Wesell is introduced as a "dangerous bounty hunter", while Obi Wan meets Dex in "a tough part of town".
The Verdict: If you loved the film, this is a faithful adaptation. How's that for faint praise? (RH)

Tank Girl
Titan
By Alan Martin and Jamie Hewlett

Gosh, this is a funny one. When the stories collected here were first published, I was still reading the UK Transformers comics, so the whole late '80s/early '90s trend in mature British comics passed me by. Well, I did read Crisis, but since I was only a child back then, we'll pass by that one so my newsagent doesn't get into trouble... Tank Girl was the big success of that era of comics, and has amassed its fair share of hype/legendary status, helped in no small part by being out of print for years. Finally, on the back of artist Jamie Hewlett's success with the imaginary pop group Gorillaz, Titan Books does the decent thing and lets us newbies see what all the fuss was about.
And... it's a funny one. This has to be one of the oddest comics I've read in a long time. Not odd in a Grant Morrison-going-fruit-loopy way, but in its own subtle, non-conformist way. Tank Girl became a youth rebellion icon, and there's an (un)healthy dose of that on a superficial level here, as the titular character drinks, smokes, farts and shags her way around the Australian outback. The unique way it breaks conventions, however, is in how it reads quite unlike the majority of comics out there. The closest analogy I can make is to the *Road Runner* cartoons. These strips are all plucked from the defunct anthology Deadline and many do not go beyond being an illustrated joke with a punch line at the end, disguised as a "moral". The character is such that longer stories would not suit, and the writing is precise and to the point, meaning that none of the stories seem stretched to fill pages, nor do they seem unpleasantly busy. Part of the reason for this success is Hewlett's energetic and detailed art, which is a little reminiscent of work from UK comics like the Beano, with lots of background details, little signs and arrows pointing to things in the panels, and that sort of thing. His pages are packed without being cluttered and this, coupled with the clever writing, means that this slim volume full of short strips is actually quite a meaty and engaging read.
It's quite obvious to this reviewer, however, that such a deep analysis goes against the anarchic feel of the book, so I apologise to the creators.
It's interesting to see the obvious effects of the strip's success as you read through the collection. The creative team seem to move from scrappy (and apparently completely improvised) beginnings to the subtle introduction of something like an over arcing plotline. Only the second volume will enable us to tell for sure.
But is it good? Well, yes. On the surface, it may seem too anarchic and the characters too unpleasant to enjoy, but it is actually a wonderfully entertaining package as well as being very interesting for those interested in how comics work. This is the kind of just-off-mainstream material that we should all read now and then and kudos to Titan for releasing it alongside their more mainstream products.
The Verdict: I'd have to read the later collections to test whether Tank Girl's legendary status is deserved, but for now it's safe to say that this is both highly enjoyable and deeply interesting, and how many titles can you say that about? (KG)

2000AD Presents #2: Judge Dredd: Death Trap!
Big Finish Productions
Written by David Bishop; Directed by Nicholas Briggs

This is the second in Big Finish's original CD audio adventures featuring Mega-City One's finest lawman; this time facing off against his greatest foe, the alien super fiend himself, Judge Death.
Mark (*League Of Gentlemen*) Gatiss hisses his way through the role, modelling his performance on the Bond villain Hugo Drax, if his comments to Borderline in issue 9 are to be believed. Does he sound menacing? Oh yes... But does he sound like Death, whether as a disembodied spirit, or inhabiting a corpse? Not to my mind. I couldn't help but picture him as Kaa, the snake from *The Jungle Book*.
There's a nice little Hannibal Lecter riff between Dredd and the incarcerated Dark Judge near the beginning, and Bishop displays his considerable knowledge of the milieu by weaving together threads from lots of different Dredd stories into a coherent whole. What might have been a recipe for disaster for all but the most devoted Dredd devotee, Death Trap! manages to walk the tightrope of explaining things for casual listeners without bogging the play down with lengthy exposition. For example, knowing the backstory of the Mechanismo Robo-Judges adds depth to their appearance here, but it isn't essential to follow events, and their usage makes perfect sense.
Timed to coincide with the reappearance of Judge Death in current issues of 2000AD, either by accident or design, Death Trap! doesn't have a prayer of competing with the Wagner and Irving series *My Name Is Death*, which has managed to restore the character back to his former fiendish best after many years relegated to a more comedic role. But taken in isolation, Death Trap! is well worth 70 minutes of anyone's listening time. That Toby Longworth is able to convincingly portray both Judge Dredd and his former robot servant Walter the Wobot should impress and baffle in equal measure.
The Verdict: Given the limitations of a bottle story, where the status quo must be restored by its end, Bishop makes the journey from points A to A an enjoyable one. (JE)

SPIDER-MAN MOVIE REVIEW

Despite being in the UK, where it has yet to be released, Borderline's Mike Sivier has managed to see a preview and says, "It's a webbed wonder!"...

FOR comics fans, this really was the big one. After scoring a hit with a minor character in *Blade*, and making serious money for the studio, if not themselves, with *X-Men*, could Marvel Comics pull it all together with *Spider-Man*?

Fans had been waiting with baited breath for this one, ever since the film rights were originally sold in 1985 - and 17 years is a long time for anyone to hold their breath. But the wait has not been in vain - *Spider-Man* is a triumph. And it seems the formula for success was a very simple one:

stick to the basics.

Spider-Man opens with what is almost a straight re-telling of the origin story familiar to millions of comics readers from Amazing Fantasy #15. The details are either the same or very similar, but fleshed out to give a depth greater than the comic could provide. So we meet nervous, geeky Peter Parker (Tobey Maguire), a teenager in his final year at high school. At home he's the light of his Aunt May and Uncle Ben's lives - but at school he's a joke, despite his obvious intelligence. Even the bus driver laughs at his expense, forcing Peter to run alongside the vehicle for several blocks after arriving late at the bus stop.

On this occasion, Peter is on his way to the Columbia Genetic Research Institute for an encounter with a radioactive spider that diverges quite drastically from the comicbook version while retaining its spirit - and quietly introduces us to the facts that Peter is an amateur photographer, and that he is crazy about his next door neighbour, Mary Jane Watson.

Needless to say, he gets bitten by the bug and starts to feel very ill indeed. When he gets better, strange things start happening to him. He wakes up to discover muscles have sprung to life all over his skinny body overnight. He can keep up with the bus when he's late catching it. He can fire webs from his wrists... Peter's reaction to his newfound status is remarkable to behold. Suddenly he can walk up walls; he's got a nifty new spider-sense which means he can tell when bullies like Flash Thompson are sneaking up on him; and he's strong enough to beat the tar out of them when they do. To what use should be put these new powers?

Wrestling.

So begins the chain of events that will lead inexorably to the death of Peter's beloved Uncle Ben - whose appearance in this film finally makes him a character in his own right, rather than a plot device - and to Peter becoming the amazing Spider-Man (rather than the Human Spider - his original choice of name). Tobey Maguire brings a difficult character to life in Peter Parker, effectively conveying his awkwardness with people his own age, his joy at discovering his spider-like abilities, his guilt, grief and shame at his own selfishness and the loss he and his Aunt suffer as a result, and his loneliness. This is a complicated character and it takes time to get to know him - fortunately the film runs for two hours!

That might be a long time for something that people could expect to be fluffy popcorn-fodder, but trust me - you won't notice it. Director Sam Raimi was a perfect choice for this film, with his grounding in comicbook-style action (the *Evil Dead* films, *Crimewave*), and he also manages to handle the

emotional side of Mr Parker's life with the gravity it deserves.

Raimi has already signed up to direct a sequel - along with Maguire and Kirsten Dunst, who plays Peter's sweetheart Mary Jane - which should bring joy to the hearts of the masses after seeing this film. One player who won't be back next time, though, is Willem DaFoe, who plays both Norman Osborn, father to Peter's friend Harry, and the Green Goblin - the villain of the piece. In the minds of fans, the Goblin goes with Spidey in exactly the same way the Joker goes with Batman, and this could be a big reason for the decision to make him the featured villain – just as the Joker was chosen for the first Batman movie.

That's not the only similarity with *Batman*. The opening title sequence, with its striking visuals and Danny Elfman score, is very reminiscent of that film. It's a move that smacks of movie studios hedging their bets - but that's only a minor niggle. Back to Willem DaFoe. His portrayal of Norman Osborn's descent into madness is a major asset to the film, working well with Raimi's style of directing to make Osborn's split personality both comical and menacing. His presence in the lives of Peter and his friends provides a strong unifying force for the film.

But ultimately this is a movie of moments - and it's great movie moments that people take out of the cinema with them: the shock of discovery when Peter's webbing makes its first appearance; the exhilaration of learning how to web-sling around a city - an education that gets off to a *very* shaky start; the fear when the Goblin throws Mary Jane off the Brooklyn Bridge.

The joy when you see that strange red and blue costume for the first time.

It's a classic.

Mike Sivier

BEAUTIFUL LOSERS

Lionised by the critics, loved by a small hardcore of fans, completely ignored by everybody else. In this series of columns, we look at the comics series which vanished far too quickly.

This month: Ande Morgensen on Steve Moncuse's Fish Police.

FISH POLICE

Fishwrap; Comico + Apple Comics

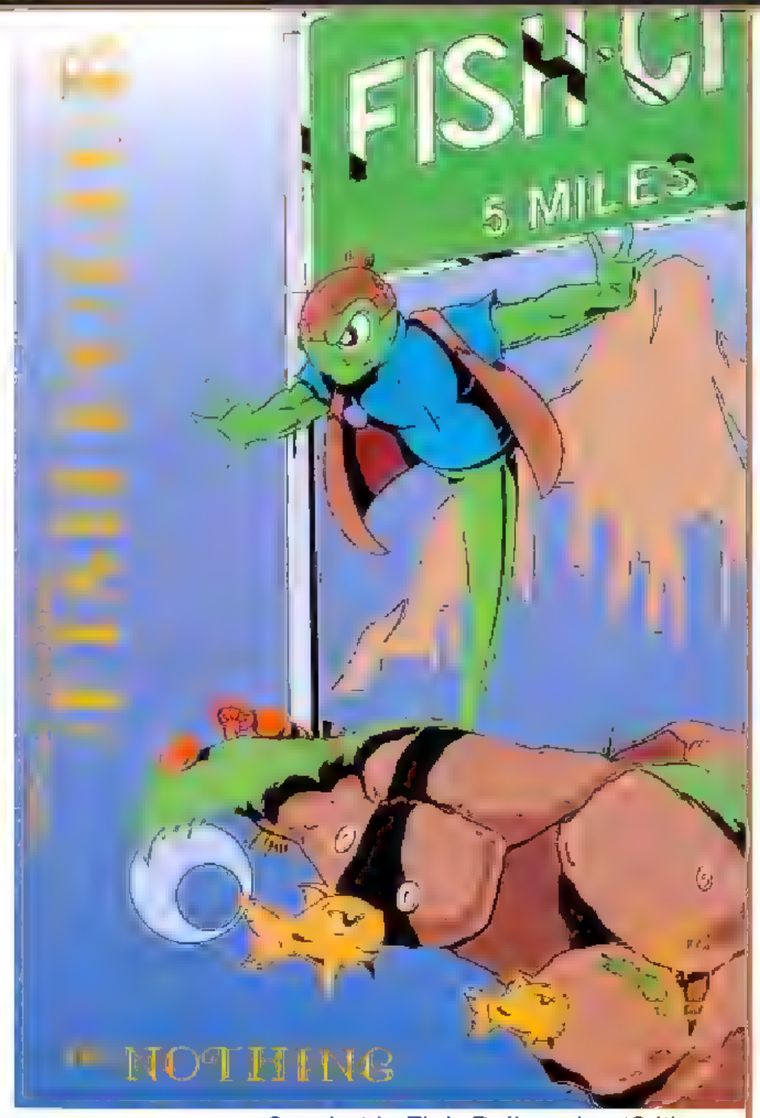
By Steve Moncuse (with Paul Nagy)

THIS was an ambitious project that encapsulated the spirit of independent publishers during the 1980s. When Fish Police started in December 1985, I don't think Steve Moncuse had a *Babylon 5*-type five-year plan for it. He might have had an inkling that he was onto something special very early on but I can't be sure; unless I track Moncuse down (which I might try) there's no real way of knowing.

I first discovered Inspector Gill, Doctor Calamari, Angelfish, Oscar, Braque, Goldie, Hook, Line and Sinker back in 1988, quite ignorant of the burgeoning alternative scene after having been out of comics for 8 years. By the time I found the Comico colour reprints (#s 5-11), the Fish Police was two years old and had built up a dedicated following. The owner of my local comic shop made a healthy profit from me buying up his back stock of Fishwrap black and white originals and the repackaged graphic novel; he probably wished the franchise was as big as the X-Men because at the time my appetite for Fish was shark-like!

It's difficult to explain this series without giving away the story. Not counting #0, which doesn't really sit in the scheme of things – it was a 26-part maxi-series. If Moncuse hadn't originally planned this to be a finite series (and I don't think he did), he adapted well under the pressures of dwindling sales and having to constantly move publishers. I could say that Grant Morrison did the premise before in Animal Man, without the humour or the crustaceans, but that might mislead you somewhat.

Why was *Lois & Clark, the New Adventures of Superman* or *Moonlighting* so popular? Because the excitement generated by both series was in the sexual tension between the two chief characters. When the tension disappeared, so did the interest. Fish Police has that *feeling* about it. The first 17 or so issues give the impression that you could have walked into a comedy underwater version of X-Men with guppies and neon tetras instead of mutants – that feeling of however close you get to discovering what is *actually* happening, the further away you'll end up. But once the comic moved from the colour and high production values of the now defunct Comico to the cheap black and white printing of Apple Comics (a publisher that seemed to treat the production of comicbooks like Jack the Ripper treated prostitutes) it was almost as if Moncuse wanted to finish the story as quickly as possible.



So what is Fish Police about? It's about good versus evil; it's about having a good time at all costs, it's about demolition drinking, it's about underwater creatures in vaguely familiar settings doing things that don't make sense. It's also paradoxical and ultimately a bit anal-retentive. Fish Police is about *you*! And me. And him over there in the corner. It's a voyage of self-discovery told against a backdrop of conspiracy and power struggles. It's *Dynasty* with limpets – *NYPD Blue* with crabs – *Cheers* with underwater beer! There are distinctly black and white characters but some of them

Inspector Gill –

What Moncuse – the writer – achieves with this series is to be funny and still keep a story interesting; something that is difficult to do in comics. For instance: Peter David is a great writer of humorous dialogue but he relies on a lot of observational humour. Moncuse actually builds great sitcom scenarios into each issue and remarkably he carries them off very well; because of the quirkiness of the subject matter the reader soon becomes engrossed in new characters; the ability to make the reader quickly like a new cast member is something uncommon with comics' writers. Invariably the character's interest is generated through mystery rather than personality development. The one flaw of this series was that the comic's secret was bigger than the comic itself and it trivialises all that went before it, which is why I believe it has such a poignant ending.

Moncuse – the artist – had areas of his game where he lacked big time, but if you look at the first Fish Police story arc, *Hairballs*, and compared them to the last couple of Comico issues or the final few of the Apple run, you'll see that he developed well as a sequential artist, even though a lot of his stock poses became irritating. However it became apparent with his eagerly awaited follow-up series Livingstone Mountain that his development was not progressing at the desired rate. His work is at its best when coloured, and the flat four colours of old fashioned comics are all you really need to bring some of his pages to life – especially his splash panels, as Moncuse obviously likes working big.

Ultimately Fish Police disappointed. After 20-odd great issues teeming with intrigue, multi-layered subplots, murder, beer-drinking competitions, sexual tension, excellent characters and some really fishy puns, it seemed to get wrapped up far too quickly. The final issue was one of those wish fulfilment events that leave you feeling sad yet happy as well; Happy: that it's finally over. Sad: that it ended up ultimately disappointing.

are grey; even the ones you're sure are either good or bad end up being somewhere in the middle. There are also a couple of anomalies in the series, the first being Oscar the squid – he's the hard-boiled newspaper reporter who also just happens to have more knowledge about the 'grand scheme of things' than he's letting on. And then there's Hook – who on the surface appears to be the antithesis of Gill, the series' hero. Hook's the archetypal villain, the Doctor Doom of his world, except... he's just a little bit *too* grey. Had this series become as popular as Spawn perhaps we would have seen these characters develop and reveal the deeper secrets that their creator may have built into them.

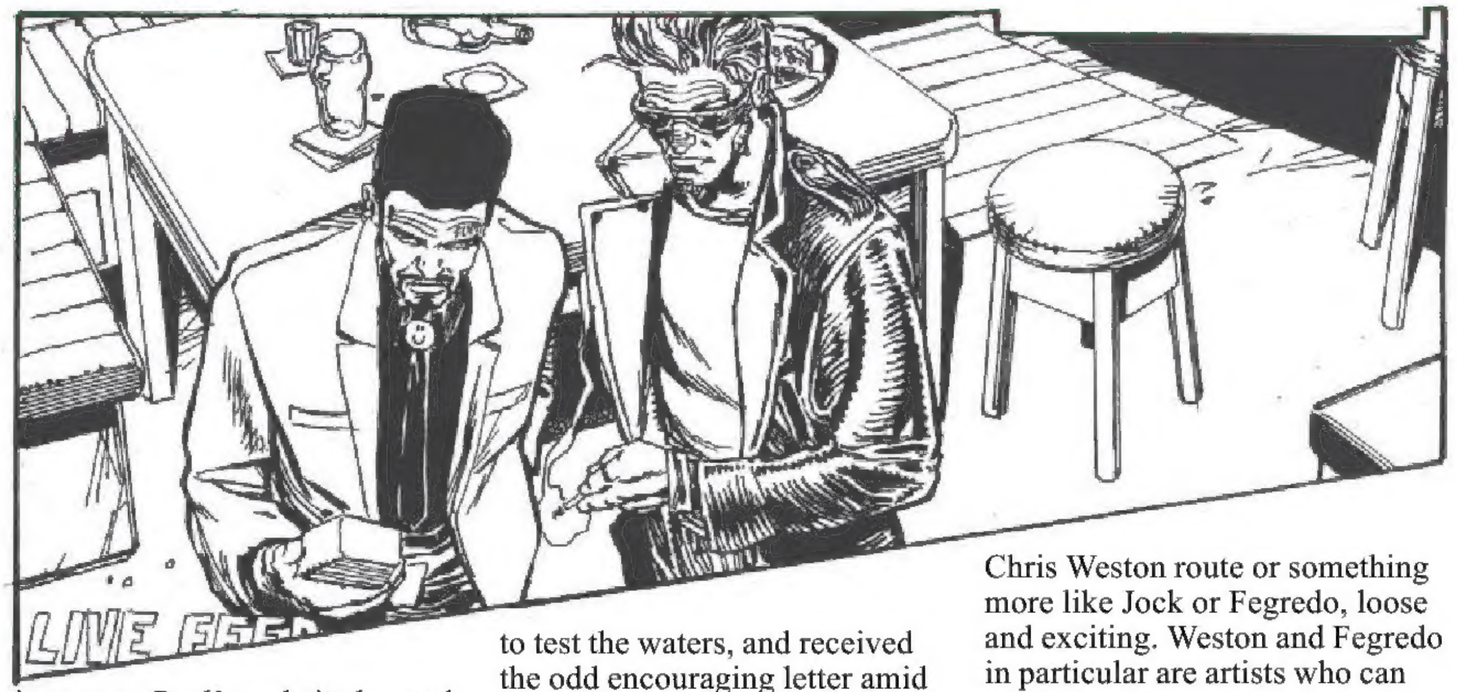
YEAH, YOU'RE THE CHIEF, AND I'M... GILL I'M A COP OR SOMETHING
BUT DON'T YOU HAVE TO TAKE LESSONS TO BE A COP? OR READ A BOOK?
GILL, I'M GOING TO COUNT SLOWLY TO THREE
"ONE..."
FOUR FINGERS. I'VE GOT FOUR FINGERS! CARTOON CHARACTERS HAVE FOUR FINGERS!
"...TWO..."
"THREE!"
FRIKK
HELP! I'M BEING KID-NAPPED BY A RAT FISH!
GILL, WE'RE GONNA HAVE A LOOONG TALK.

Fish Police v1 (Fishwrap) #1-11; Dec 1985 - November 1987) #0; April 1991
Fish Police Special (Comico) #1; July 1987
Fish Police v2a (Comico) *Hairballs* (collects v1 #1-4) December 1987
v2b (Comico) #5-11 (reprints v1 #5-11) April, June, August, October, December 1988; February, April 1989; v2c (Comico) #12-17 (new material) May, July, September, November 1988; January, March, May 1989; v2d (Apple) #18-26 (new material) August 1989 - November 1990
Fish Police v3 (Marvel) #1-6 (reprints) October 1992 - March 1993

Click on Globe returns to contents

YOUNG GUNS

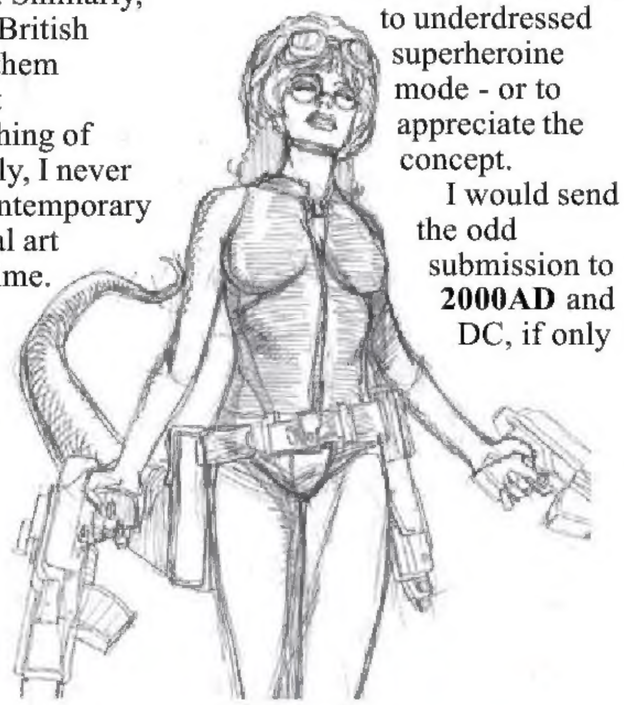
It's not age but talent that determines tomorrow's stars today... this issue: Adrian Bamforth



I STUDIED at Canterbury art college from 1990-1992, choosing to specialise in Fine Art rather than illustration largely because the people were more interesting - which was important when there was so little actual tuition. The way I saw it was that fine artists are more likely to be good illustrators because they're not just thinking inside this one niche. Similarly, I think the success of a lot of British comics artists has to do with them thinking as artists and not just illustrators, expressing something of their personality. Unfortunately, I never had much appreciation for contemporary fine art, such as the conceptual art which was so popular at the time.

I kept coming back to **2000AD**, which for me was far more in the tradition of art through the centuries.

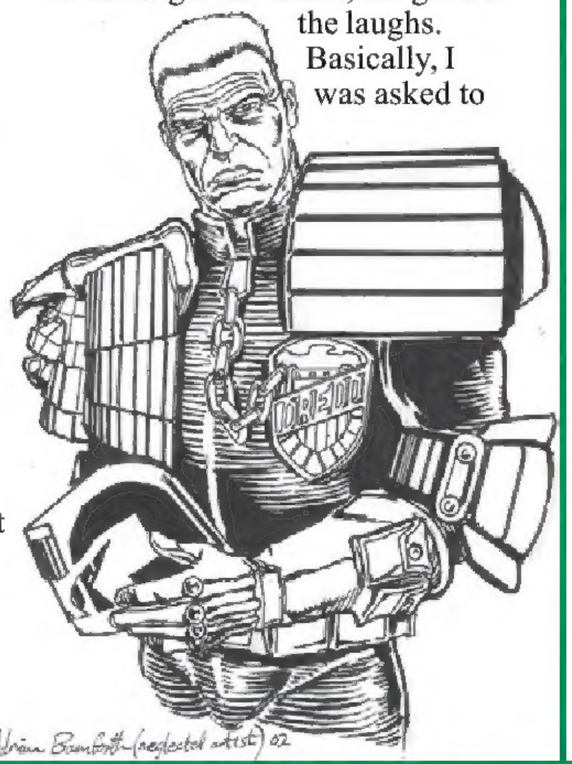
I later collaborated with occasional *Future Shock* writer Paul Carstairs on a number of strange small press comics: **The Body Shop**, **Aaaaaargh Tales** and **Mean Time** (some of which is now on Paul's website located at *www.cucomics.com*) for kicks, and for practice, and small press favourite **The Jock** by Rol Hirst, a fantastic story and great fun to draw. There was also an early **Octobriana** thing, which I utterly failed to get right - I found it hard at the time to switch to underdressed superheroine mode - or to appreciate the concept.



I would send the odd submission to **2000AD** and DC, if only to test the waters, and received the odd encouraging letter amid the rejections. Finally (skipping ahead some years here) Andy Diggle gave in and offered me a *Judge Dredd* to draw (*Married With Juves*), which duly appeared a year later. Dan Abnett was keen on the art and got in touch through our mutual comics retailer (we both live in Kent) and campaigned to get me a couple of *Sinister Dexter* one-offs, which cheered me up immensely after I'd that morning received a negative response from Tharg. Strangely enough, Tharg actually still seems keener on handing out scripts to the likes of Ezquerra and Kennedy than to me, so for the moment it's back to the drawing board and the creative struggling until Tharg simply can't refuse - or that **2000AD** art droid coach crash actually happens.

I tend to face a dilemma especially when it comes to inking: whether to go the tight Chris Weston route or something more like Jock or Fegredo, loose and exciting. Weston and Fegredo in particular are artists who can lend themselves to almost any strip, because it's just really good drawing and storytelling.

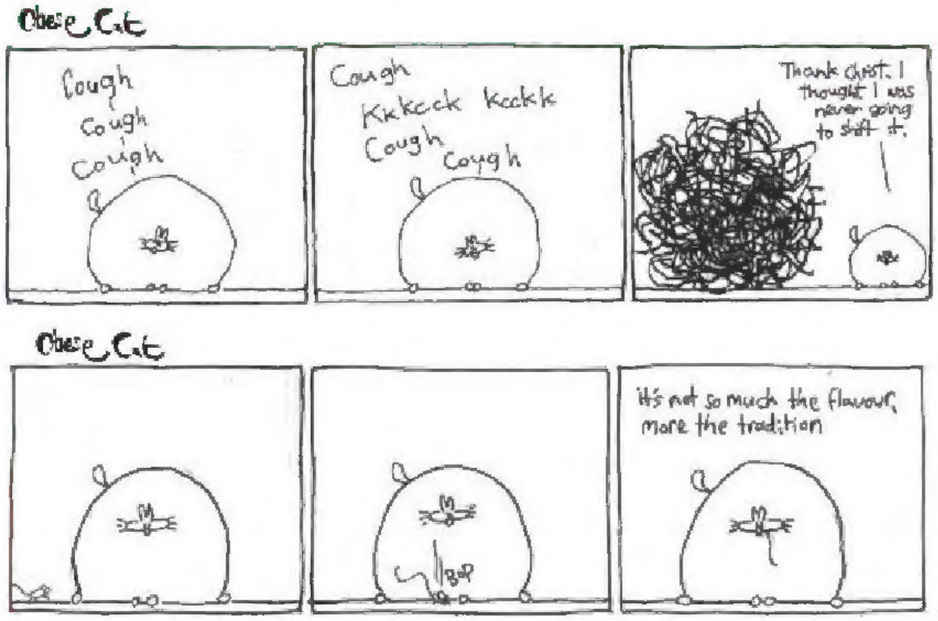
I also created a strip called **Obese Cat**, which is kind of like Garfield, though funnier, obviously. It's based on the idea of the larger the feline, the greater the laughs. Basically, I was asked to



ADRIANBAMFORTH.COM

come up with a newspaper style strip, a genre I don't really like, so I just took the piss out of the idea and created a monster.

Fortunately I also make a living drawing storyboards for TV advertising, which is usually great fun and good practice, especially as the turnaround is so quick that it forces you to get better and faster. As for future projects, I guess I'll have to find a way of presenting some of this stuff to Vertigo, but I'll be happy to just do more *Sinister Dexter* strips or *Dredd* strips. But if that's not my passport to global media domination, there's always the cat...



A selection of Adrian Bamforth's artwork ranging from DC's House of Secrets characters to Rebellion's Judge Dredd with his own Obese Cat strip (above). Regarded by many as

THE HOUSE OF SECRETS
GRONK
OH BUH-NO! I-I BUH-DIDN'T BUH-SEE THAT BI-MUH-MOVIE AT ALL
I'M BUH-REALLY VERY-GR-GRATEFUL, GE-BUH-GREGORY
I KNOW BUH-CAIN WOULDN'T BUH-LIKE YOUR BUH-BEING HERE

The Birmingham Street boys shriek It's Chrisssstmas as they descend on celebrity graveyards, exhuming, chopping up and snorting long-dead rock stars, getting good and fucked up on the rich deposits of old drugs and crystallized adrenaline in their beery, wet carcasses.
It's a winter thing.

Artists! Want to be featured in Drawing Board or Young Guns? Contact Phil Hall at phil.hall@borderline.mediahall.co.uk or editorial@borderline.mediahall.co.uk
We're constantly looking for established artists and newcomers to give them exposure they might otherwise fail to get from other, less comprehensive comics magazines!

WORLD OF HEROS

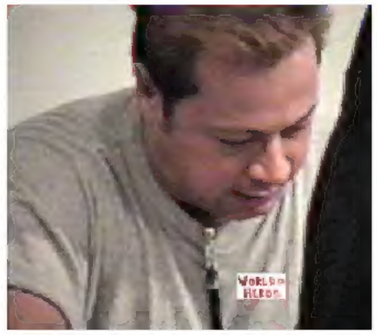
Chris Claremont sues Oxford English Dictionary over copyright, "Them words mine," he claims.

Chris Spicer & the World of Heros investigative team continue to scour their imaginations for all kinds of bollocks...

MARVEL ANNOUNCES MORE SENSITIVE COMICS - OUTRAGE

AFTER the recent announcement of The Call, a comic based on the exploits of firefighters who clean up after terrorist attacks, Joe "9-11 Makes Baby Jesus Cry" Quesada has announced several other comics which will deal with other sensitive issues in an equally sensitive way.

In The Jonestown Files, Federal Agent Murphy and his cynical sidekick Agent Titsout investigate a seemingly innocent mass poisoning, only to uncover evidence of bizarre cult rituals and a sinister conspiracy that points to the President... of the company that makes Koolaid. This title will be followed by The Student, a comic telling of the ghost of a protestor crushed beneath the treads of a tank as part of the Tiananmen Square massacre and his spectral quest for justice. Finally will come The Mansons, a wacky, knockabout sit-com based on the hilarious devil-worshipping exploits of everyone's favourite family of mass murderers.



In an exclusive interview, Quesada (left, drunk) told us: "I thought of these. All on my own. They're gonna be great. You know, I'm not as think as you drunk I am. Burp."

Fan reaction has been varied, with comments ranging from "This is sick" to "Frankly, I'm disgusted" and even as far as "Sounds like the kind of thing Vertigo would put out." Quesada, though, is unrepentant. "Fuckemall," he told us. "You're my besht mate. I love you, I do."

Marvel's comics won't be the first to tackle sensitive or controversial subjects. Art Spiegelman's Maus dealt with the holocaust, while a recent issue of long-running British anthology 2000 AD ran a strip entitled *The Six Million Dollar Queen Mum*, featuring the recently deceased kindly old woman reanimated as a psychotic cyborg killing machine. "Never let it be said that we're not responsive to the mood of the nation," said 2000 AD's alien editor Tharg, despite not actually existing.

We spoke to Bill Rosemann, Marvel's Executive In Charge Of Liberally Distributing Bullshit, who told us "Get out of my house! And put those polaroids back where you found them."

"We know what comics are," claims Image's Jim Valentino. "Phil Silvers, he's a good one and that Bob Hope guy, he's damned funny."

WARREN ELLIS THINKS ABOUT NEW COMIC - SHOCK!

WARREN Ellis has announced that he's working on a new title for Avatar - but, in a surprising move, he's just going to think about it.

"This is the way I've been heading for a long time anyway," Ellis told us. "Recently, I've seen myself as more of an ideas man than anything else. It started when I re-vamped the X-titles. I came up with this plot and co-wrote some of the titles, and I realised that I was enjoying myself enormously. Then I came up with some concepts for Avatar, leasing them some titles, characters and ideas that I'd had, but letting other people produce the regular series. This is just taking that concept on a step further - this time, I've had a great idea, but I'm going to let someone else originate, plan, plot and script the actual comic." So, it's going to be someone else's comic? "No, it'll have my name on the cover. And the pay cheque."

A spokeman for Avatar told us "This is a great situation for us. Normally, we put out two kinds of comics: comics full of naked women, and comics with Warren's name on the cover which actually sell. This way, we're going to able to combine the two!" Into a comic full of naked women with Ellis' name on the cover? "No, into a comic full of naked Warren Ellises!"

A final word from Ellis? "To you, this looks like a normal briefcase, but in fact it is the Briefcase of Truth! It's speaking to you. Can you hear it? It's telling you to fuck off before I set about you with my trained attack-penis."

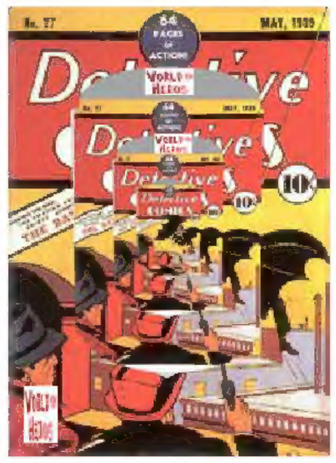
DC3D – " IT'S SO GOOD IT MAKES MY SHIT ITCH" - PAUL LEVITZ

DC has announced that by utilising the very latest in printing technology, they will be re-printing some of their most important comics in three dimensions!

The new marketing ploy, known as DC3D, has caused huge excitement at DC. A nameless, faceless, anonymous employee told us "We're all buzzing about this! Technology has come on in leaps and bounds, and we're pleased to be able to harness the cutting edge of printing to produce these incredible, revolutionary comics!" Asked how the technology works, the employee gushed "Well, the pages are printed in red and green, see, and there are these special glasses..."

The first DC3D comic to see print will be Detective Comics #27, although we're promised that the future will see three-dimensional reprints of Action Comics, World's Finest and the Preacher: One Man's War special. "Preacher's in there because it was an intelligent, mature, moving comic," expostulated the DC spokes-thing, "and this time, when that disabled guy throws that big lump of shit, it's gonna look like it's coming *right* for you!"

The announcement of DC3D has provoked a wide reaction from fans, ranging from "pointless cash-in" to "worthless rip-off," and even as far as "Sounds like one of those robots from *Star Wars*, no, not the gay one, the little one that looked like a dustbin."



We tried to talk face-to-face with someone at DC, but were stopped at the doors by menacing robot security guards with glowing red eyes.

Jemas claims more notches on bed post than Levitz. "And I'm quicker than him, every time" claims Marvel chief.

WIN WIN WIN WIN WIN WIN

In association with Titan Books
Borderline is giving away 10 copies of
Tank Girl Volume One by Hewlett & Martin

Titan launches the first of its Tank Girl collections and we've got a stack of the little buggers to give away...All you've got to do is answer a simple question and one could be yours!

Borderline has ten copies of Titan Books' luscious new Tank Girl book to give away to the first names drawn out of the brash wee thing's dirty bra on August 1st, with the correct answer to the following question:

What is the name of the hip hop band that Jamie Hewlett is associated with?

a) Wombatz
b) Gorillaz
c) Lemmingz

Send your answers either by email to: editorial@borderline.mediahall.co.uk
or on a postcard to the editorial address before August 1st 2002.